



Employer Engagement by Community Colleges in New York State



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Contents

A photograph of three people in a meeting. On the left, a woman with dark curly hair is smiling. In the center, a man with a beard and a green lanyard is looking down. On the right, a woman with long blonde hair is smiling. They are all looking at a laptop screen which is partially visible at the bottom of the frame. The background is a bright, modern office space with a wooden wall and colorful sticky notes.

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Executive Summary

Employer engagement at community colleges occurs when employers work with these educational institutions to shape how students are trained. It has become an increasingly important strategy for community colleges to help their students build the right skills for available jobs, and to help local employers find and retain workers with the skills they need. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York conducted a survey of community colleges in New York State during the months of March–May 2017 with the goal of documenting the amount and types of such activities by New York’s community colleges. Survey questions were designed with the input of a number of community college presidents, executives, and experts in workforce development and employer engagement.

The survey focused on gathering information and data on five key areas of community college employer engagement: (1) the scope of employer engagement, including the number of employers, size, and industries engaged with; (2) the various forms of employer engagement activities; (3) resources devoted to employer engagement efforts, including budgets and staffing; (4) strategies and hurdles faced by community colleges when it comes to employer engagement; and (5) the perceived success of and future plans for employer engagement efforts. Survey results were compared among various geographies within the state, including metropolitan areas relative to rural areas, and upstate New York relative to the New York City area.

This report aims to elucidate the amount and types of activities that occur between New York State’s community colleges and employers, and to bring greater awareness of these activities to industry, workforce, and economic development leaders.

Key Findings:

- **A typical community college engages with more than 100 local employers, and every community college surveyed performs some type of engagement activity.** Indeed, employer engagement by community colleges in New York State is the norm. About 40 percent have a budget earmarked specifically for employer engagement, and around 90 percent of those surveyed have at least some staff dedicated to employer engagement efforts.
- **In New York State, employer engagement spans every industry sector.** Healthcare is the most common industry with nearly 90 percent of colleges engaging with employers in this sector. The manufacturing and information industries follow closely behind with around 80 percent of community colleges working with employers in these sectors. All community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas engage with employers in the accommodation and food services industry.

- **Employer engagement tends to occur mostly with medium-sized firms.** Among New York State’s community colleges, about 40 percent of the employers that a typical community college engages with have between 10 and 50 workers, while another 30 percent have between 50 and 250 workers. Community colleges located in metropolitan areas, particularly in and around New York City, tend to engage with more and larger employers than those located in the rural areas of the state.
- **Nearly all community colleges surveyed have employers who serve on curriculum advisory committees, come to campus for guest lectures, offer workplace visits and tours of their facilities, provide work experience and job opportunities to students, help students prepare for the job market by participating in career fairs or mentoring, or work to promote the college or its programs to the local community.** While less common, it is not unusual for employers to provide financial aid to students or resources to help set up classrooms, labs, and special equipment needed for training purposes. Community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas are more likely to receive direct financial support from the employers they engage with than those near New York City or in rural areas.
- **Community colleges in New York State form and build relationships with local employers in many different ways.** Community colleges regularly engage with employers at networking events or target local employers by contacting them directly about potential opportunities to work together. It is also quite common for local employers to initiate contact with

community colleges when they have specific training needs. In addition, community colleges rely on their students, alumni, and faculty to find employers to engage with.

- **Nearly all colleges reported that they do not have enough financial resources and staff to find employers to work with.** Community colleges serving the rural areas of the state commonly face the challenges of not having the information necessary to determine local labor market needs or not having enough jobs available from local employers. Furthermore, while close to 90 percent of New York’s community colleges have staff to foster employer engagement, a quarter of community colleges in rural counties have no such staff.
- **Community colleges generally rate their employer engagement efforts as moderately successful in terms of both helping their students find jobs in the local economy and helping to meet the needs of the local labor market they serve.** Community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas give somewhat higher ratings than rural or New York City area schools.
- **Most community colleges in New York State plan to increase the amount of employer engagement they do over the next few years.** Colleges expect to do so by both enhancing existing relationships with local employers and finding new employers to work with. As such, community colleges plan to devote more financial resources and staff to workforce development and community outreach going forward.

Introduction



In today's dynamic and constantly evolving economy, workers may not always have the right skills to meet the needs of employers. Higher education plays an important role in helping workers build and maintain the skills they need to succeed in today's labor market. However, workers' skills still may not adequately meet employer needs even after completing various forms of skill building and training offered by higher education institutions. Indeed, employers often find that workers emerging from higher education are not sufficiently prepared for the jobs they are trying to fill.¹ Furthermore, while workers may have had the right skills to do their jobs at one point in time, as businesses adapt to a changing economic environment and new technologies, employers often find that their existing workforce needs additional training.

Such "skills gaps" are at odds with the expectation that students will obtain necessary skills during their education to land a job after completing their schooling. In fact, those completing a college degree or other forms of training may find that the right job is not simply waiting for them, leading to unemployment, underemployment, or the need for additional training.²

All in all, there can be a disconnect between the skills that workers obtain while in school and the skills that employers need in their workers. Direct communication between these two sides of the labor market is often lacking, leading to inefficient outcomes for employers and workers alike. Strong connections between employers, higher education institutions, and workers can be extremely helpful in reducing these frictions in the labor market. In particular, such connections can be created and strengthened when higher education institutions work directly with employers to prepare students for available jobs, often referred to as "employer engagement."

A. Employer Engagement

Employer engagement occurs when employers take an active role in shaping how workers are trained by educational institutions or other workforce development organizations. Employer engagement covers a wide array of activities, ranging from employers serving on advisory boards or helping to design instructional programs to entering into formal partnerships and contracts to train workers in specific skills for their own current needs.³ In some cases, employers devote significant financial resources to help educational institutions prepare students for the workforce.

Employer engagement can help educational institutions align their programs with employer needs. Given their experience, employers have firsthand knowledge about the skills that are in demand, both with respect to their own particular needs and in the labor market more generally. With the assistance of employers, educational institutions can train students to develop the skills needed to fill available jobs, and help upskill employers' incumbent workers to help them adapt to change. As a result, engaging employers can increase the likelihood that students will land good jobs and that their own workers can keep their skills current, reducing mismatch between the skills that workers possess and the skills employers need.

1 See, for example, Bessen (2014) and Bauer-Wolf (2018).

2 See, for example, Abel, Deitz, and Su (2014) and Arum and Roksa (2014).

3 Colborn (2014) defines a range of community college employer engagement activities and Wilson (2015) provides a continuum of such activities. Barnow and Spaulding (2015) and Spaulding and Martin-Caughey (2015) discuss the role of employer engagement in workforce development programs more generally.

Improving the ability for people to match their skills to available jobs is especially important since the job market is dynamic, with skills needs constantly changing. Communication between educational institutions and employers helps higher education react to changing labor market needs, and can help workers keep their skills up to date and relevant, leading to better employment outcomes for students and employers, and a stronger local labor market.

B. Community Colleges and Workforce Development

Community colleges are at the forefront of employer engagement efforts, given their unique position within the higher education landscape.⁴ Community colleges have multiple overlapping missions that broadly fit into two increasingly connected categories. First, they offer academic training. Such training can take the form of associate degrees, and occasionally bachelor's or postgraduate degrees, as well as preparing students to transfer into undergraduate programs. Community colleges also offer continuing education for adult members of their communities, and help people obtain their high school equivalency. Second, community colleges help workers build and maintain skills necessary to succeed in the labor force, whether that training involves young students or incumbent workers. Such activities come under the umbrella of workforce development.⁵

State governments typically require that community colleges offer workforce development services in their local communities and provide funds for achieving this goal. Community colleges offer a variety of workforce development training, including vocational and technical training programs, as well as credentials and certifications in specialized fields. In addition to helping young workers who recently received a high school diploma prepare to enter the labor force, workforce training helps upskill incumbent workers and retrain displaced workers who have lost their jobs because their skills no longer match available jobs. Workforce development may involve customized training of workers under contract with specific employers or government agencies.

Workforce development training at community colleges tends to focus on helping workers take jobs in the local economy. Employer engagement is particularly important in this regard. Local labor markets have their own unique characteristics, with each community possessing a unique industry composition and specific skill needs. In addition, the dynamic nature of local economies means that available jobs and skills requirements undergo constant change. Employers disseminate this vital labor market intelligence to community colleges where it can be used to help students.

C. Community College Strategies for Employer Engagement

Employer engagement helps community colleges respond to changing local labor market needs and skill requirements, and each institution has its own unique strategy. There are two

4 See, for example, Kisker and Carducci (2003), Soares (2010), and Woods (2015) for discussions on the growing role of community colleges and employer engagement in workforce development.

5 See Van Noy et al. (2008) and Jacobs (2015) for discussions of the evolution of credit and non-credit programs offered by community colleges in the United States.

main ways that community colleges differ in their approaches to employer engagement efforts. First, funding varies widely across institutions, with some community colleges able to devote more resources to employer engagement efforts than others. Second, community colleges tend to focus on their local communities, and each sits in a unique local economic environment. Since employer engagement strategies need to be tailored to individual industries and employers, each community college will have different priorities and approaches to preparing their students to take jobs in the local community. For example, one community college may be situated in a labor market that has numerous manufacturing employers and jobs, while another in a rural area may have few manufacturing jobs, but an abundance of jobs in agriculture and tourism. Because every employer is different, some may be more willing and able to engage with community colleges than others. All in all, each community college will have its own approach, objectives, priorities, and challenges when it comes to employer engagement.⁶ With such varying approaches, there are also a variety of outcomes from employer engagement efforts and differing levels of success.

D. Survey of Employer Engagement by Community Colleges in New York State

Because employer engagement has become increasingly important for community colleges, recording the amount and types of activities can be particularly helpful.⁷ It is difficult to assess which strategies work, and to determine how successful such efforts have been at helping students and employers. Moreover, information about how community colleges can improve their employer engagement, as well as understanding impediments to creating and expanding such efforts, is critically important.

Consequently, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York conducted a survey of community colleges in New York State with the goal of gaining some basic information about the nature of employer engagement by community colleges. The survey used an online questionnaire that was fielded between March and May of 2017. Survey questions were designed with the input of a number of community college presidents, executives, and various experts in workforce development and employer engagement.

We requested participation in the survey from all 37 public community colleges in New York State, and received 33 responses, resulting in a response rate of about 90 percent. The survey was completed by the community college president or other high ranking official at the community college with knowledge about workforce training and employer engagement efforts, such as the director of workforce development.

⁶ Wilson (2015) and Mann (2017) catalog and provide examples of various employer engagements strategies and approaches.

⁷ Two examples of these types of assessments include Yarnall et al. (2016), which offers a framework for evaluating partnerships between employers and community colleges, and Osterman and Weaver (2016), who assess the connection between a nationally-representative sample of manufacturing establishments and community colleges from the employer perspective.

The Landscape of Community Colleges in New York State



New York State provides an opportunity to learn about employer engagement because there is a diversity of colleges serving different populations across an array of geographical domains with a variety of economic structures and employment opportunities. All together, there are 37 public community colleges in New York State located in 33 counties with an aggregate annual enrollment of about 225,000 students. The State University of New York (SUNY) oversees 30 of these community colleges, with an approximate aggregate enrollment of nearly 150,000 students, while the City University of New York (CUNY) oversees the remaining seven community colleges located in New York City, with an approximate total enrollment of around 75,000 students.⁸

The map on the following page shows the location of New York State's community colleges. Community colleges generally draw students from and serve local labor markets, typically a county or metropolitan area. As such, they are distributed across New York State and often operate in quite diverse economic environments. Some are located in sparsely populated rural areas with a relatively small number of local employers, while others are located in large and dense urban areas with numerous local employers, with many in between. As a result, colleges in the state have an incentive to develop their own unique approaches to workforce development and employer engagement.

For example, Finger Lakes Community College is located in Ontario County with a population of just over 100,000 and where wildlife and tourism are prevalent in the local economy. As a result, the college has programs such as fishing and wildlife technology, natural resource preservation, and viticulture and wine technology. By contrast, Erie Community College (ECC) is located in the Buffalo metropolitan area, where healthcare and education are important sectors, and a large number of manufacturing companies are often in need of skilled workers. Many programs at ECC focus on training workers in these sectors. Similarly, the Fashion Institute of Technology, located in the New York City area, primarily focuses on preparing students to enter the fashion industry, which has a strong presence in New York City.

All in all, community colleges will have different approaches to training workers in large part because they are responding to different local labor market needs. Because of these differences, it is useful to categorize community colleges according to the local economic environment in which they operate. Table 1 on the following page identifies three such categories that we will use in analyzing data from the survey. The first category, *NYC Area*, includes 14 community colleges that operate in the large and dense New York City metropolitan area, which includes the five boroughs, New York City's northern suburbs, and Long Island. The second category, *Upstate Metro*, includes 14 community colleges that serve one of the ten small-to-mid-sized metropolitan areas in upstate New York. The third category, *Rural*, includes the nine remaining community colleges in New York State, located in counties that are not part of metropolitan areas in the state.

⁸ Figures represent full-time equivalent enrollment for Fall 2016, which includes students in credit and non-credit programs. Data are sourced from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Location of Community Colleges in New York State

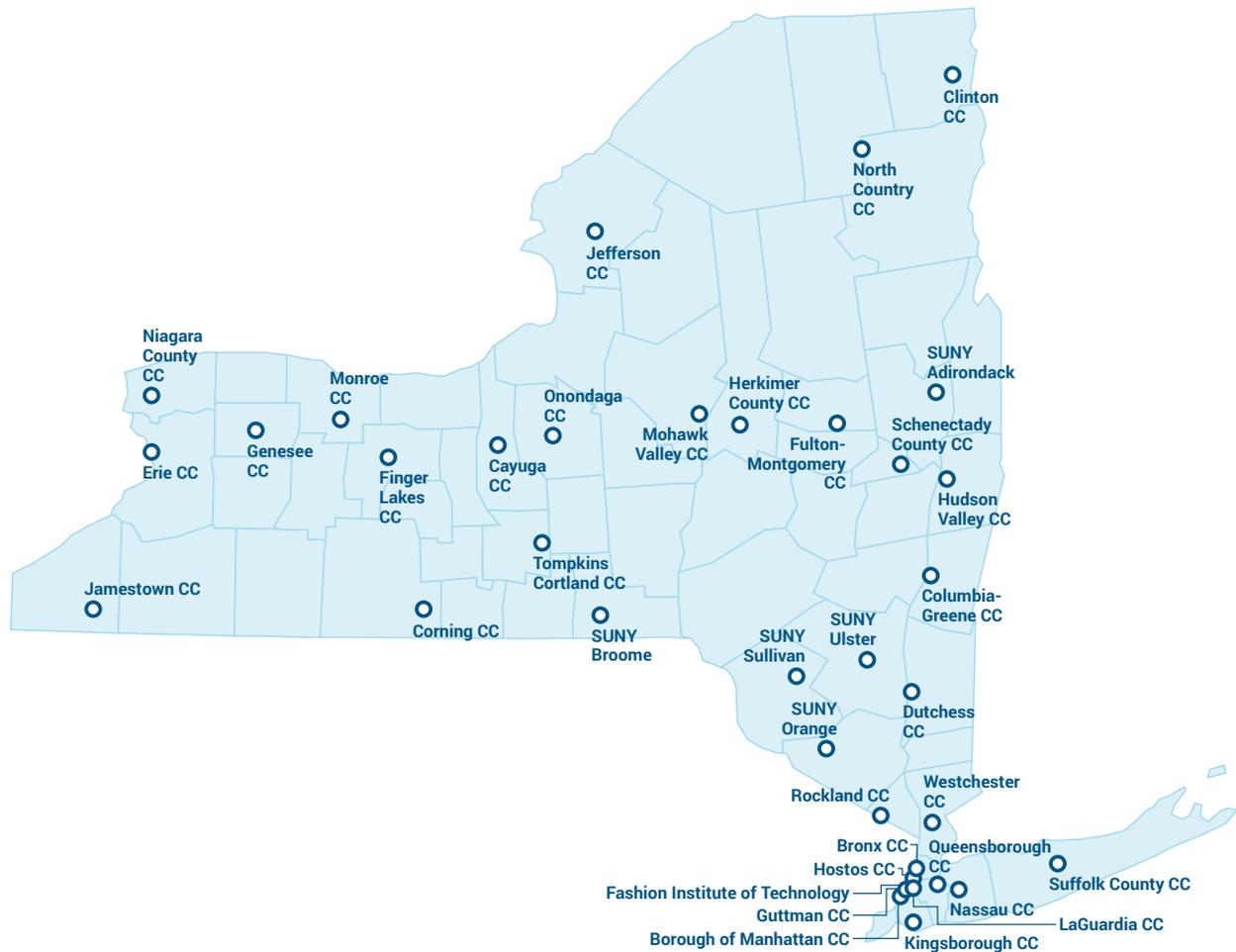


Table 1: Classification of Community Colleges in New York State

NYC AREA	UPSTATE METRO	RURAL
Borough of Manhattan Community College (CUNY)	Erie Community College	Cayuga Community College
Bronx Community College (CUNY)	Finger Lakes Community College	Clinton Community College
Dutchess Community College	Herkimer County Community College	Columbia-Greene Community College
Fashion Institute of Technology	Hudson Valley Community College	Corning Community College
Guttman Community College (CUNY)	Jefferson Community College	Fulton-Montgomery Community College
Hostos Community College (CUNY)	Mohawk Valley Community College	Genesee Community College
Kingsborough Community College (CUNY)	Monroe Community College	Jamestown Community College
LaGuardia Community College (CUNY)	Niagara County Community College	North Country Community College
Nassau Community College	Onondaga Community College	SUNY Sullivan
Queensborough Community College (CUNY)	Schenectady County Community College	
Rockland Community College	SUNY Adirondack	
Suffolk County Community College	SUNY Broome	
SUNY Orange	SUNY Ulster	
Westchester Community College	Tompkins Cortland Community College	

As Table 2 shows, the local economic environment varies considerably across these three groups of community colleges. In the New York City area, the average population for the county in which a community college sits is 1.4 million people, while the upstate metro and rural community colleges are located in counties with a population of about 170,000 and 75,000, respectively. In addition, community colleges located in and around New York City serve a much denser area and have access to many more local employers than those located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas or in rural parts of the state. Moreover, some community colleges are located in counties where jobs are growing, while others are in counties with persistent job loss. The median rate of job growth from 2000 to 2017 for counties in the New York City area was 15 percent. There was no job growth in the upstate New York metropolitan area counties with a community college, and employment declined by two percent in the rural counties of the state with a community college. Similarly, population growth tends to be much slower in upstate New York, particularly in rural areas, than in the New York City area.

Table 2: Characteristics of Community Colleges in New York State and the Local Labor Market Served

	MEDIAN COLLEGE ENROLLMENT	MEDIAN COUNTY POPULATION	MEDIAN COUNTY POPULATION DENSITY	MEDIAN COUNTY ESTABLISHMENT COUNT	MEDIAN COUNTY JOB GROWTH, 2000-2017
NYC AREA	8,619	1,420,337	3,544	40,101	15%
UPSTATE METRO	4,078	169,570	233	3,654	0%
RURAL	1,780	75,485	95	1,783	-2%
OVERALL	4,421	179,417	245	4,247	3%

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2015-16 Academic Year; U.S. Census Bureau: 2017 Population Estimates, 2010 Census Summary File 1, 2016 County Business Patterns; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages.

Note: Population density is expressed as people per square mile.

This grouping also captures differences in the community colleges serving these areas. For example, community colleges in the New York City area tend to be larger than the community colleges in the upstate New York metropolitan areas, which in turn tend to be larger than community colleges in rural areas, though there are exceptions to this general pattern. For perspective, median full-time equivalent enrollment was around 8,600 students among colleges in the New York City area, 4,100 for colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas, and around 1,800 students for those in rural areas.

Nonetheless, despite the smaller absolute size of the community colleges in the upstate New York metropolitan areas and rural counties, these schools are often larger in relation to the size of the overall economy and serve a larger share of the workforce than may be typical in the New York City area. As a result, community colleges in these locations may be a relatively prominent player in training the local workforce, especially in rural areas. Thus, the amount and types of employer engagement are likely to systematically vary across these groups of schools.

Results of Community College Employer Engagement Survey



The survey was designed to gauge the amount and types of employer engagement activity undertaken by community colleges in New York State. For context, we asked community colleges about how intensively their institutions were focused on workforce development and career readiness programming, since these are often precursors to employer engagement. Also, effective employer engagement requires information about the local labor market, so we asked community colleges how they assess the needs of the local labor markets they serve. We then probed five different areas of employer engagement which assess in detail the nature of employer engagement by community colleges: (1) the scope of employer engagement, including the number of employers, size, and industries engaged with; (2) the various forms of employer engagement activities; (3) resources devoted to employer engagement efforts, including budgets and staffing; (4) strategies and hurdles faced by community colleges when it comes to employer engagement; and (5) the perceived success of and future plans for employer engagement efforts.

A. Focus of Community Colleges in New York State

Since community colleges provide both general academic instruction as well as workforce training to help students prepare for available jobs, we asked about the focus of institutions on academic programs relative to workforce development. Two-thirds reported that their institutions are focused on general or academic programs, but offer a significant amount of workforce development training. The remaining one-third said that they are mostly focused on academic programs, but offer at least some workforce training. Community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas reported a somewhat greater emphasis on workforce development training than those located near New York City or in rural areas.

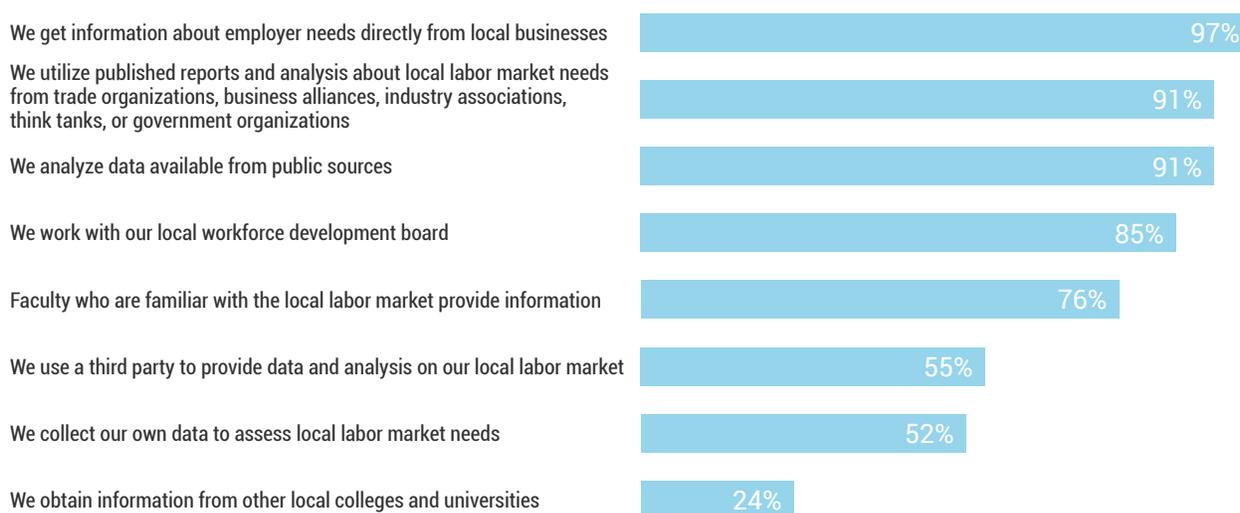
On average, about 60 percent of students were enrolled in academic programs, while roughly 40 percent of students were enrolled in workforce development training.

We also asked community colleges about the share of students enrolled in general academic/transfer programs relative to technical or career readiness programs. On average, about 60 percent of students were enrolled in academic programs, while roughly 40 percent of students were enrolled in workforce development training. Thus, while workforce development is generally not the primary focus of New York State's community colleges, these findings suggest that it is an important aspect of the training provided by community colleges to students.

B. Assessing the Local Labor Market

Community colleges in New York State are increasingly providing workforce training to help meet the needs of the local labor markets they serve, which is often a precursor to employer engagement efforts. As such, we asked community colleges if and how they gather information about the demand for workers with certain skills in their region and the training desired by local employers. Figure 1 shows a summary of the responses.

Figure 1: How does your institution assess local labor market needs, such as the demand for workers with certain skills or training desired by local employers?



Responses indicate that all community colleges gathered information about their local labor markets. Nearly all community colleges (97 percent) said that they obtain information about the local labor market directly from employers in their area. The other most common approaches to assessing the local labor market are analyzing publicly available data (91 percent), using published reports (91 percent), and working with the local workforce development board (85 percent). Community colleges located in metropolitan areas throughout upstate New York were somewhat more likely to work with their local workforce development boards to obtain information about the local labor market than community colleges in and around New York City or in rural areas.

About three-quarters of community colleges in New York State have faculty that provide information about local labor market needs. Just over half say they use a third party or collect their own data to assess the needs of their local labor market. Finally, less than a quarter of New York State community colleges obtain information from other local colleges or universities. This practice was much less common among community colleges located in the more isolated rural areas of the state.

Assessing Local Labor Market Needs

Monroe Community College | *Rochester, New York*



Monroe Community College (MCC) focuses on addressing skills gaps between what employers need and the skills of local workers. As part of this endeavor, MCC performs extensive research on local labor market conditions through its Division of Economic Development and Innovative Workforce Services. MCC identifies industries in the local community that are in need of workers with particular skills, and creates programs for workers to build those skills. Labor market information is updated regularly using both

traditional and real-time labor market data from multiple sources. Data and analysis on the local labor market is made available to the public through an online portal as well as various reports. These analyses describe job openings in the area and what these jobs typically pay, as well as other information. Examples of analyses of the local labor market include identifying job openings in advanced manufacturing, applied technologies, and healthcare, and recent reports such as the Rochester Area Skills Needs Assessment and Business Climate Survey.

<http://www.mccediws.com/>

C. Scope of Employer Engagement

To gauge how much employer engagement is taking place at New York State's community colleges, a set of questions focused on the scope of employer engagement. Survey results show that employer engagement is widespread, and that institutions engage with a range of different employers of various shapes and sizes. Some engage with relatively few employers, others with many more, across the industry spectrum.

Employer engagement is widespread, and institutions engage with a range of different employers of various shapes and sizes.

1. Number of Employers

Employer engagement is common among community colleges in New York State, with every school having at least some employer engagement activity. As shown in Figure 2, the typical community college engages with well over 100 different employers. However, there is considerable variation in the number of employers that community colleges engage with, ranging from as few as 10 employers to as many as 2,000. Perhaps not surprisingly, community colleges located in metropolitan areas, particularly the New York City area, tend to engage with more employers than those located in rural areas of the state. When considering the magnitude of these findings, it is important to keep in mind that a broad definition of employer engagement was used throughout this survey, ranging from activities such as serving on an advisory board to providing financial resources to the school.

Figure 2: Considering the full range of employer engagement activities, approximately how many employers does your community college engage with in any form?



Note: Figures represent median employer counts across community colleges for each geographic area.

2. Size of Employers

In terms of employer size, community colleges are more likely to engage with mid-sized firms than small or large firms. As shown in Table 3, about 40 percent of the employers that a typical community college engages with have between 10 and 50 workers, and another 30 percent have between 50 and 250 workers. Community colleges located in the New York City area are much more likely to engage with large firms (i.e., more than 250 workers), while community colleges in rural areas are somewhat more likely to engage with small firms (i.e., fewer than 10 workers).

Table 3: If you had to give a very rough estimate, what proportion of these employers would you say falls into each of the following size categories?

	OVERALL	NYC AREA	UPSTATE METRO	RURAL
10 OR FEWER WORKERS	10%	10%	10%	15%
BETWEEN 10 AND 50 WORKERS	40%	20%	40%	40%
BETWEEN 50 AND 250 WORKERS	30%	25%	35%	33%
MORE THAN 250 WORKERS	12%	32%	8%	10%

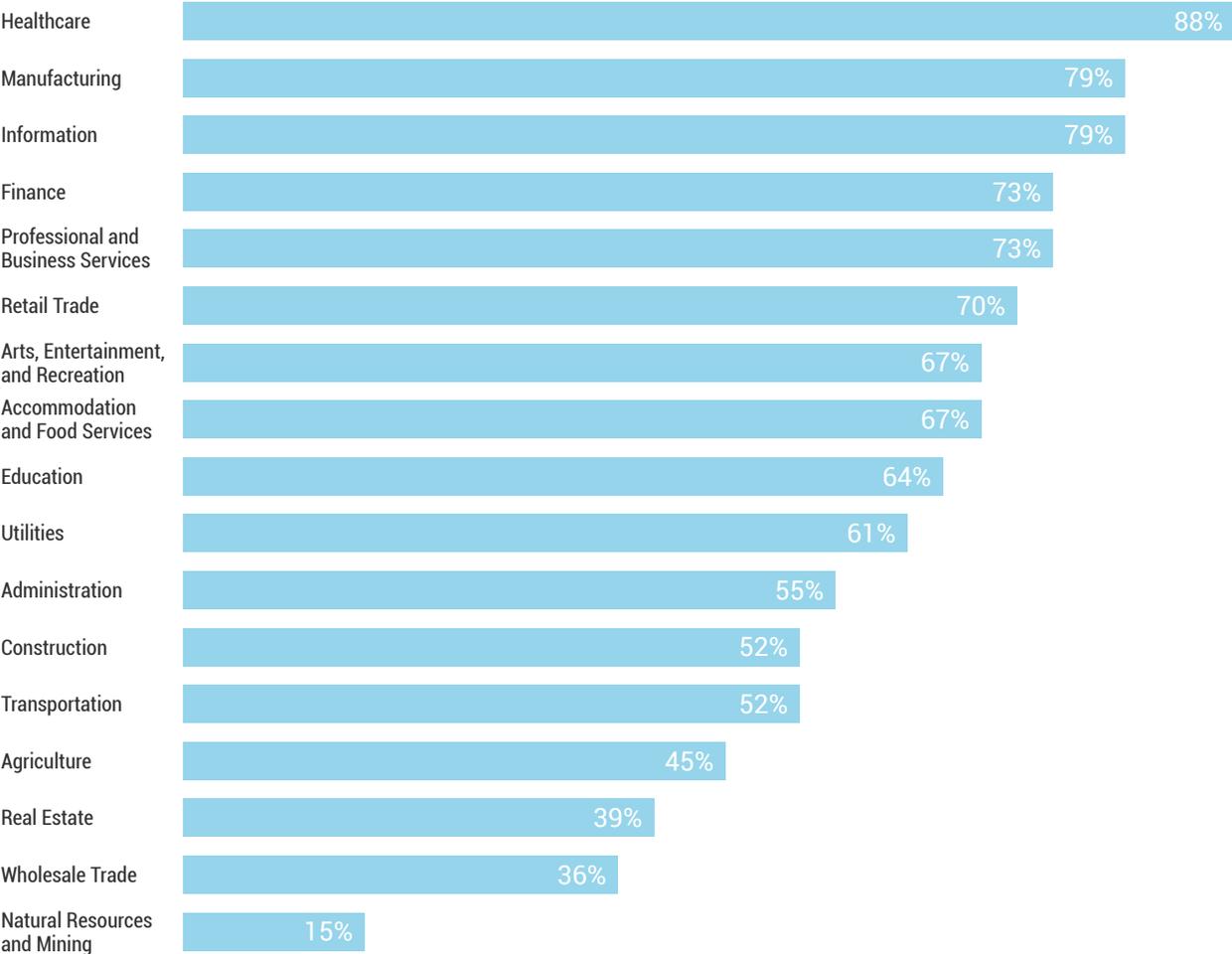
Note: Figures represent median shares across community colleges for each size category, and therefore may not sum to 100 percent for a given geographic area.

3. Industry Representation

Community colleges in New York State engage with employers operating in every industry sector. As shown in Figure 3, healthcare is the most widely cited industry, with almost 90 percent of community colleges working with employers in this sector. Indeed, healthcare programs are commonly offered at community colleges, and these programs typically involve at least some work experience, often with local healthcare providers (nursing, for example). All of the community colleges located in the metropolitan areas in upstate New York report having relationships with healthcare employers.

Community colleges in New York State engage with employers operating in every industry sector.

Figure 3: Are you engaged with employers in any of the following industries?



EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

The Healthcare Industry

Schenectady County Community College | *Schenectady, New York*



Schenectady County Community College (SCCC) developed a joint program with Ellis Medicine-Belanger School of Nursing to prepare students for licensure as a registered professional nurse. Students admitted into the program take biological and social science courses at SCCC and then complete their nursing courses at the Belanger School of Nursing, located within the Ellis Medicine system. By providing nursing education within the hospital system, course

instruction focuses on the care of patients and students gain clinical practice and exposure. Graduates of the program earn an Associate in Science degree in nursing, conferred by the Ellis Medicine Board of Trustees, and start their nursing careers within the Ellis Medicine system.

<https://sunysccc.edu/Academics/Math-Science-Technology-and-Health/-Academic-Programs/Nursing-AS-with-Belanger-School-of-Nursing>;
<http://www.ellismedicine.org/school-of-nursing/>

In terms of other common industry sectors, about 80 percent of community colleges engage with employers in the manufacturing and information sectors. Further, about three-quarters of community colleges say they engage with employers in the finance and business services sectors, though such engagement is more common among New York City area community colleges, given the importance of Wall Street to the New York City economy. About two-thirds of community colleges indicate they engage with employers in the retail, accommodation and food services, arts and recreation, education, and utilities sectors. All community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas engage with employers in the accommodation and food services sector.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

The Manufacturing Industry

Erie Community College | *Buffalo, New York*



In partnership with several regional employers, Erie Community College (ECC) developed the Machining/Manufacturing Alliance (MMA) to provide workers with skills in precision manufacturing. Two such programs include the Associate of Occupational Studies degree in Industrial Technology, and the Computer Numeric Control (CNC) Precision Machining Certificate Program. Employers in the MMA provide feedback on curriculums, organize tours for students, and can

view graduates' resumes. ECC offers these programs in response to the demands of local employers, particularly because of a shortage of workers in the precision metal working industry.

<https://www.ecc.edu/mma/>

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

The Utilities Industry

Jefferson Community College | *Watertown, New York*



Jefferson Community College has partnered with the Center for Energy Workforce Development, National Grid, Con Edison, and the Fort Drum Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program to develop the New York Troops to Energy Jobs Natural Gas Boot Camp. This program is a non-credit, six-week workforce ready training program designed to support a soldier's transition to civilian life and work in the utilities industry during the final months of their

active duty service. Active duty soldiers attend classes on the campus of Jefferson Community College and at National Grid's training facilities in Syracuse and Watertown, NY.

<https://us.ournationalgrid.com/news-article/were-honored-to-help-veterans-help-us/>

Around half of community colleges have employer engagement activities in the administrative, construction, transportation, and agriculture industries. Not surprisingly, community colleges in upstate New York are more likely to work with agricultural employers than those in the New York City area. In terms of industries where employer engagement is less common across all geographies, roughly 40 percent of community colleges engage with employers in real estate and the wholesale trade industry, and 15 percent of community colleges engage with employers in the natural resources and mining industry.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

The Agriculture Industry

SUNY Adirondack | *Queensbury, New York*



In response to a growing agribusiness sector in Saratoga, Warren, and Washington counties, SUNY Adirondack developed an Associate of Applied Science degree in Agricultural Business. The degree prepares students for work in farm and food systems, with a focus on the economies of small farms, niche growers, and specialty producers. The college developed the degree program with an industry-based agricultural advisory board, which included 10 regional farmers and representatives from 20 agricultural

industry organizations. The interdisciplinary degree is a collaboration between the business and science divisions of the college. Students have opportunities to visit working farms in the region as early as their first semester of classes.

<http://www.sunyacc.edu/degree-programs/agricultural-business>

D. Forms of Community College Employer Engagement

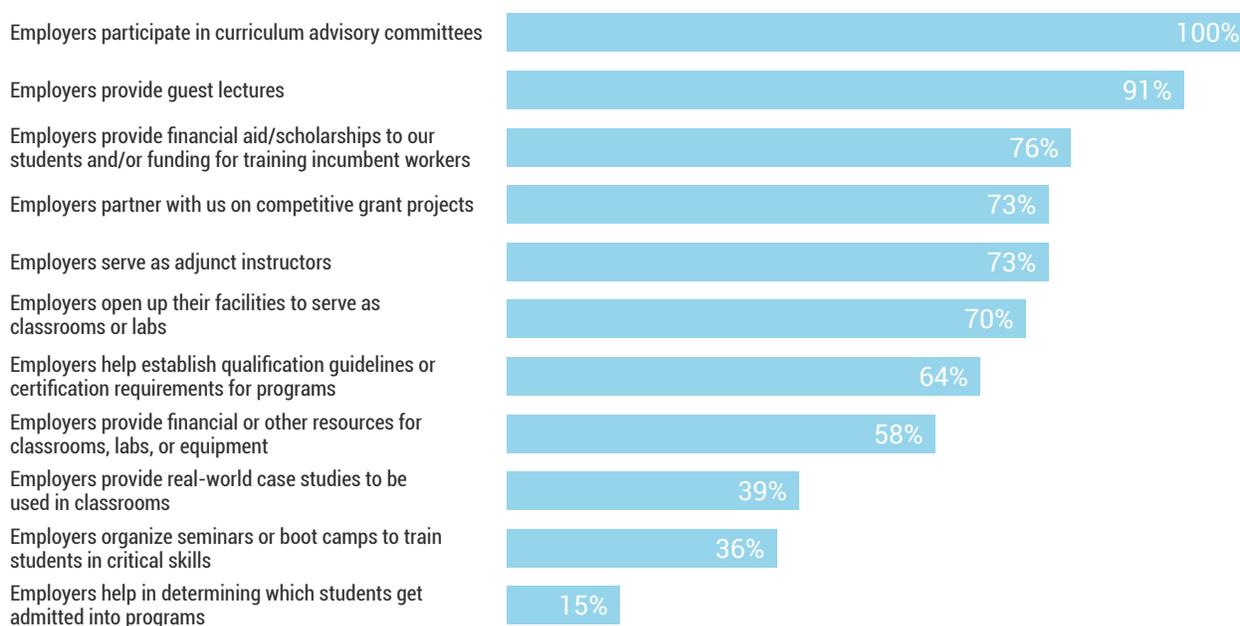
Employer engagement by community colleges can take many forms. To gain a better understanding of the amount and types of employer engagement that are occurring in New York State, we asked about the following five categories: (1) providing education and training support, (2) providing work experience for students, (3) preparing students for the job market, (4) supporting faculty, and (5) providing leadership for community colleges.⁹ Below we outline survey results for each of these five categories of activities, and gauge the incidence with which they occur among community colleges in New York State.

1. Providing Education and Training Support

Employers provide a wide range of support for education and training at community colleges. Examples of this type of employer engagement include serving on curriculum advisory committees, helping to establish qualification guidelines for students, providing guest lectures, sponsoring customized training programs, and providing financial support for classroom equipment and supplies.

As Figure 4 shows, every community college indicates that employers participate on their curriculum advisory committees. In terms of employers teaching in the classroom, about 90 percent of the schools say that employers provide guest lectures, and about three-fourths say that employers serve as adjunct instructors at their institutions. It is somewhat more common for employers to serve as adjunct instructors at community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas than in rural areas or New York City.

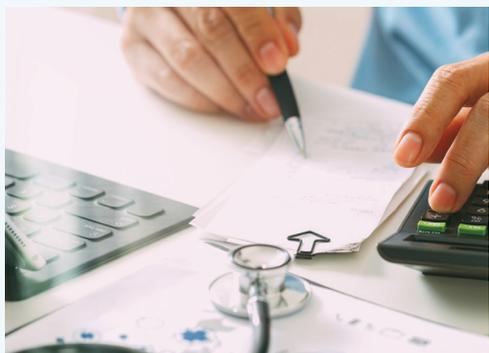
Figure 4: In which of the following ways, if any, do local employers provide education and training support for your institution?



⁹ The categories of employer engagement used in this survey are based on work by Colborn (2014) and Wilson (2015), as well as conversations with community college executives and experts in workforce development and employer engagement.

Providing Education and Training Support

LaGuardia Community College | *Queens, New York*



In 2016, a multi-partner collaboration between LaGuardia Community College, Weill Cornell Medicine, New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare, the New York City Department of Small Business Services, and the Harvard Business School Club of New York (HBSCNY) led to the creation of the Medical Training Billing Program. As an employer partner, Weill Cornell Medicine was involved in curriculum development, participant assessment, onsite training, interviewing, and post-training feedback, and HBSCNY managed the collaboration. After completing the program, graduates receive nine college credits and are guaranteed

a job interview with Weill Cornell Medicine. Weill has hired more than half of the graduates since the beginning of the program and graduates earn \$22 an hour on average, or about \$45,000 a year.

<https://www.laguardia.edu/Home/News/Training-NYers-for-Medical-Billing-Jobs,-with-Weill-Cornell-Medicine---Harvard-B-School-Alumni/>

About three-quarters of the community colleges surveyed say that employers partner with their schools on competitive grant projects. Moreover, roughly three-quarters of the respondents say that employers provide financial assistance to students or funding for incumbent workers, and over half say that employers provide funds for classrooms, labs, or equipment. Again, community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas are more likely to receive direct financial support from the employers they engage with than those near New York City or in rural areas.

When it comes to shaping the curriculum, roughly two-thirds of the community colleges surveyed say that employers help establish qualification guidelines or certification requirements, though only about 15 percent indicate that employers help determine which students will be admitted into programs. Taking an active role in establishing training guidelines or admitting students into programs is more common among community colleges in metropolitan areas than in rural areas. Forms of employer support that were less common—but not uncommon—include organizing seminars to train students in critical skills and providing real-world case studies for the classroom.

2. Providing Work Experience for Students

Providing work experience for students is another way employers actively engage with community colleges. This type of employer engagement typically involves providing workplace visits for students, offering internships, co-ops, apprenticeships, or clinical rotations during school, and, of course, hiring students upon graduation.

As shown in Figure 5, providing work experience to students at community colleges is quite common. Almost all community colleges report that employers provide internships, co-ops, apprenticeships, or clinical rotations to their students. Moreover, roughly 9 in 10 community colleges say that employers provide workplace visits and full-time jobs for graduates. And, about 80 percent say that employers provide summer jobs for students.

Figure 5: In which of the following ways, if any, do local employers provide work experience for your students?



EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Providing Work Experience for Students

Jamestown Community College | *Cattaraugus County Campus, Olean, New York*



After collaborating with the New York State Department of Labor and the Cattaraugus-Allegany County Workforce Development Board, Jamestown Community College (JCC) identified a need for workers in plumbing jobs in the local area. JCC designed a curriculum for a non-credit plumbing training program in partnership with a local employer. The course is a 150-hour program conducted three days a week in the evening. The first module builds the foundation of the trade, and covers basic terminology, safety, and knowledge of standard equipment. The second module entails a scale-model of an interior wall of a house

to run drain, water, and gas lines to properly install items per code regulations. Within the program, multiple employers in the region are providing flexible gas, light, and pipe certifications. Students also shadow current workers in the field.

http://www.oleantimesherald.com/news/jcc-plumbing-class-aims-to-provide-students-with-new-career/article_159aab58-c82c-11e7-99db-cf37b07534fc.html

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Providing Work Experience for Students

Kingsborough Community College | *Brooklyn, New York*



Kingsborough Community College began its Maritime Technology Program more than twenty years ago, and is the only program on the East Coast where students can acquire hands-on maritime experience, such as vessel service and repair, without military training. Training is 50 percent “hands-on” in labs and on boats and 50 percent in the classroom, and most students do a summer Maritime internship. Completion of the two-year program offers graduates Brown Water licenses, which permit them to work on watercraft

inshore, in coastal waters, and in harbors. The industry advisory panel for the program includes representatives from the National Marine Manufacturers Association, the New York Marine Manufacturers Association, the Metropolitan Waterfront Alliance, and New York Water Taxi, as well as others. Business owners and experts in the industry also serve as faculty in the program.

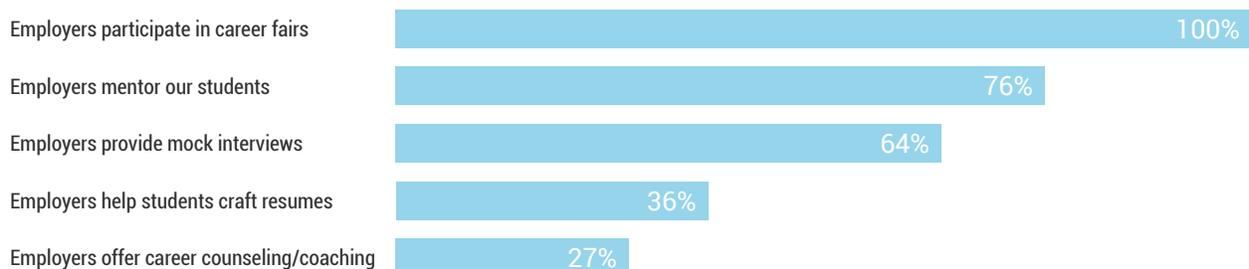
<http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/academicdepartments/maritime/Pages/default.aspx>

3. Helping Students Prepare for the Job Market

Local employers also play a key role in helping community colleges prepare students for the job market. These types of activities include participating in career fairs, providing mentoring or career counseling, and working with students to help them craft resumes.

As Figure 6 shows, employers help students prepare for the job market in a number of ways. All community colleges indicate that employers participate in career fairs. In addition, three-quarters say that employers mentor their students, and two-thirds report that employers provide mock interviews. It is less common for employers to help students craft resumes or to offer coaching. Community colleges located in rural areas report that their local employers generally provide less support to help students prepare for the job market than their metro area counterparts, particularly compared to those in and around New York City.

Figure 6: In which of the following ways, if any, do local employers help your students prepare for the job market?



All community colleges indicate that employers participate in career fairs. In addition, three-quarters say that employers mentor their students, and two-thirds report that employers provide mock interviews.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Helping Prepare Students for the Job Market

Hudson Valley Community College | *Troy, New York*



Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) teamed up with local manufacturers, as well as the Center for Economic Growth, to create the Manufacturing Technology Pathways Project. This program is designed for adults who want to join the manufacturing workforce, but may not have the time or ability to commit to a full degree of certificate program in Advanced Manufacturing Technology. The program connects students to a variety of local manufacturers who seek entry level employees for jobs such as production and assembly workers, assistant operators, and manufacturing technicians. Divided into two modules,

the first covers basic shop math, safety concepts, and effective communication skills. The second module is a hybrid model 'boot camp' that blends online courses with in-person instruction at HVCC's Lang Technical Building. This program targets the most vulnerable people in the workforce chain, such as veterans and underemployed adults who lack time or resources. The program is funded through a SUNY workforce development grant, the New York State Workforce Development Institute, the Center for Economic Growth and local manufacturing employers in the region.

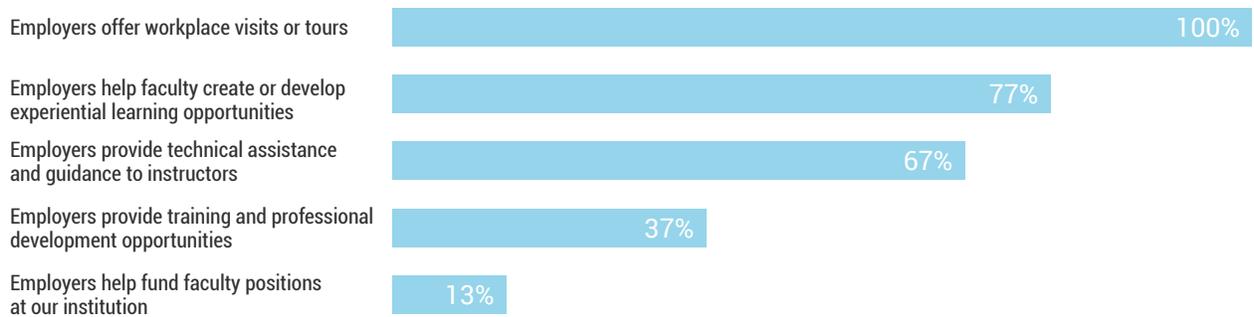
<http://www.hvcc.edu/manufacturing-pathways/>

4. Providing Support for Faculty

Local employers also provide support for faculty at community colleges. Faculty support comes in a number of forms, including offering technical assistance and guidance to instructors, helping faculty develop experiential learning opportunities for students, and offering workplace visits for faculty and staff. Some employers may even fund faculty positions at community colleges.

As Figure 7 shows, it is quite common for employers to offer workplace visits and tours to support faculty at community colleges. Helping faculty create or develop experiential learning opportunities is also fairly common, with 77 percent indicating such support. Two-thirds say that employers provide technical assistance and guidance to instructors, while one-third report that employers provide professional development opportunities for faculty. By contrast, relatively few community colleges say that employers help fund faculty positions, such as an endowed chair, though this practice was cited by 13 percent of the schools. Employers working with community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas are somewhat more likely to provide technical assistance to instructors and financial support for faculty positions.

Figure 7: In which of the following ways, if any, do local employers provide support for your faculty?



EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Providing Support for Faculty

Onondaga Community College | *Syracuse, New York*



The Apprenticeship Accelerator Career Training program at Onondaga Community College provides workers who have no prior experience a pathway to an apprenticeship in manufacturing. Employers work with instructors to align the program with the needs of each individual company. The program involves active participation from employer partners, with each company providing an in-depth tour of their facility to instructors. At the onset, employers commit to sponsoring students for apprenticeships, participate in an information session to discuss their company,

and potential job opportunities, and, ultimately, select and hire students prior to program enrollment. Once training begins, employers attend class on a regular basis and provide support to instructors through demonstrations and student competency reviews. Participating companies provide charts, blueprints, parts, and other items to aid instructors in mirroring the actual work environment as closely as possible. The program focuses on technical knowledge as well as workplace behavioral skills, helping to reduce the typical productivity loss experienced with new employees and increasing the likelihood of retention.

<http://aactjobs.com/>

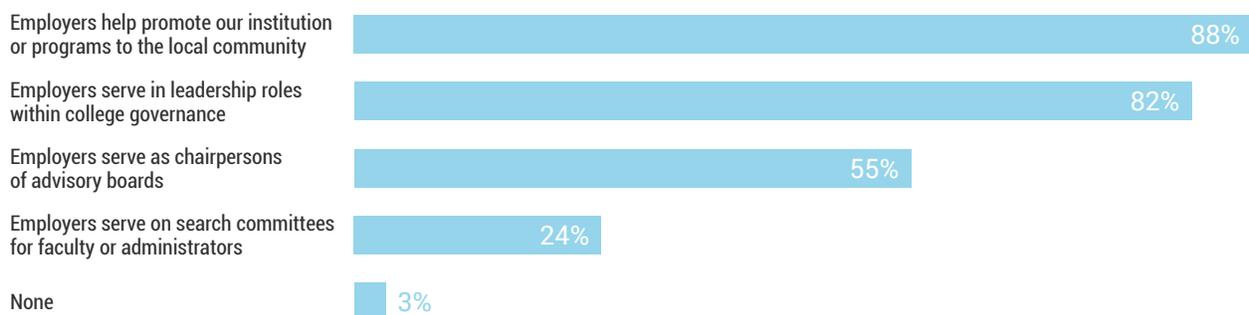
5. Providing Leadership for Community Colleges

As workforce development becomes more prominent at community colleges, employers are increasingly serving in leadership roles to help guide the direction of schools. In some cases, employers may have a formal role, such as working within college governance or chairing an advisory board. In addition, employers with strong connections to community colleges can help promote the school in the local community.

Employers are increasingly serving in leadership roles to help guide the direction of schools.

Indeed, as Figure 8 shows, about 9 in 10 community colleges report that employers promote their institution or their programs in the local community. More than 80 percent of the schools indicate that employers serve in leadership roles in college governance, while just over half say employers serve as the chair of an advisory board. Further, one-quarter indicate that employers serve on search committees. By and large, community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas and, in particular, rural areas are more likely to have local employers serve in leadership roles within college governance and participate on search committees for faculty or administrators than those located in the New York City area.

Figure 8: In which of the following ways, if any, do local employers provide leadership for your institution?



EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Providing Leadership for Community Colleges

Nassau Community College | *East Garden City, New York*



Nassau Community College (NCC) has established over 15 college advisory boards, each filled with industry representatives specializing in fields of study offered by the college, such as engineering technology, physical therapy, and paralegal studies. One advisory board that has been particularly instrumental in promoting employer engagement at NCC is its Business Leaders Council, made up of business executives that support the fundraising, marketing, and community relations endeavors for students, faculty, and staff of

the college. The council members serve as ambassadors to the business community and promote employer engagement with NCC.

http://collegecatalog.ncc.edu/current/directory/college_advisory_boards.html;
https://www.ncc.edu/aboutncc/givetoncc/business_lead_council.shtml

E. Resources and Support

Successful employer engagement requires a significant amount of time, effort, and financial resources. To gauge the level of resources allocated for employer engagement, the survey asked community colleges about budgets, staffing levels, and grant activity devoted to these efforts. Further, the survey asked the extent to which college faculty support employer engagement at their schools.

1. Budgets

Figure 9 reveals that less than half of the community colleges in New York State—42 percent—have a budget specifically earmarked for employer engagement efforts. Colleges without a budget for employer engagement presumably use resources from various other internal budgets to fund employer engagement staff and activities. Rural community colleges in New York State are somewhat more likely to have a budget for employer engagement than community colleges located in the New York City area or upstate New York metropolitan areas.

Figure 9: Do you have a budget for employer engagement efforts?

42% Yes 58% No

2. Staffing

Nearly 90 percent of community colleges indicate that their institution has staff to foster employer engagement. The median number of such staff reported among respondents was three full-time workers and five part-time workers. Since less than half of community colleges in New York State have a budget specifically for employer engagement, some of these workers are presumably included in broader budgetary categories used by community colleges. As shown in Figure 10, about 60 percent of community colleges have staff in a dedicated group or department, while roughly 30 percent have some staff for employer engagement, though they are not in a distinct department. Only 13 percent report having no staff whose primary job is to foster employer engagement. Community colleges in the New York City area were more likely to have staff operating in a distinct department. One-fourth of those located in rural areas had no staff focused on employer engagement, well above the corresponding figures for schools in the upstate New York metropolitan areas and New York City area.

Figure 10: Do you have staff whose primary job is to foster employer engagement?



3. Grants

Grants can allow community colleges to raise funds for workforce development efforts without raising out-of-pocket costs to their students. For example, many community colleges utilize the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program designed to help prepare low-wage, unemployed, and displaced workers for jobs. The survey asked institutions whether they attempted to raise money through federal or state grants. Figure 11 shows that nearly all community colleges have applied for grants for workforce development within the past five years. Of those that applied, most received funding.

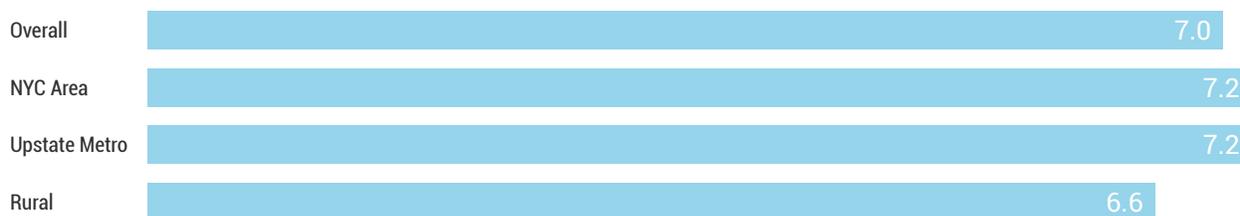
Figure 11: Has your college applied for federal or state grants for workforce development within the past five years?



4. Faculty Support

Having supportive faculty can be helpful for establishing and enhancing engagement with local employers. To gauge how supportive faculty are about employer engagement activities, we asked community colleges to assess on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating *not important* and 10 indicating *very important*, how their faculty tends to view the importance of employer engagement efforts at their schools. As Figure 12 shows, the overall median score was 7 out of 10, indicating that faculty generally viewed employer engagement as a fairly important activity. Faculty working at rural community colleges are slightly less supportive of employer engagement activities than those working at community colleges in metropolitan areas.

Figure 12: In your opinion, how does the faculty at your institution view the importance of engaging with local employers?



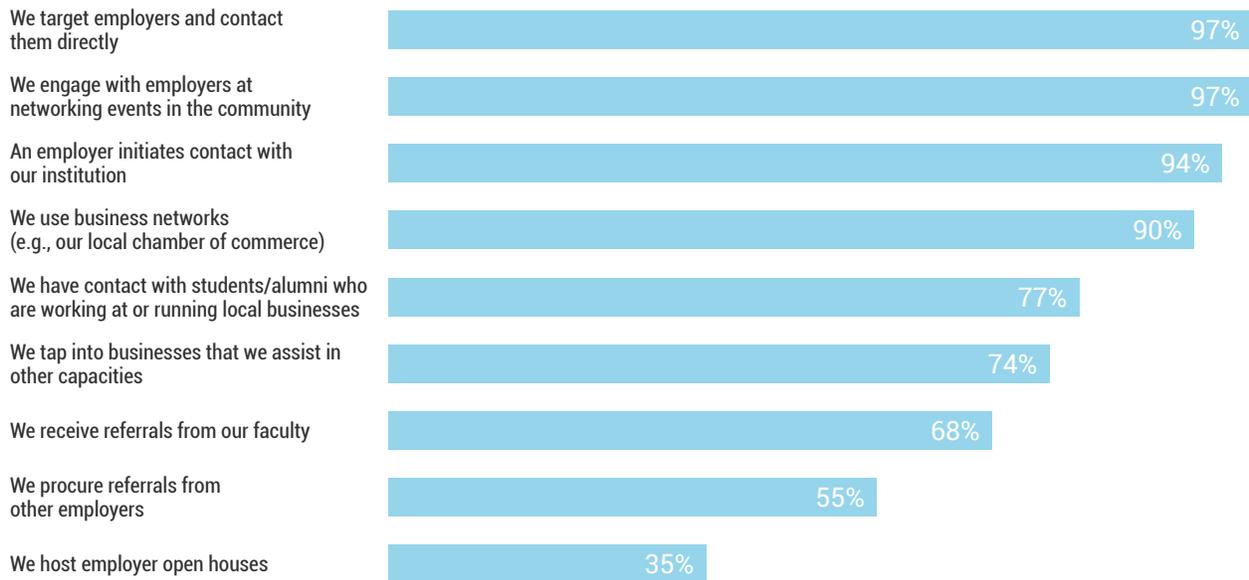
F. Strategies and Hurdles

Despite the importance of employer engagement activities, little data exist that identify the ways in which community colleges develop relationships with local employers. To help fill this information gap, we asked community colleges about the strategies they use to find employers. We also asked about the impediments they face in their employer engagement efforts.

1. Strategies

Community colleges in New York State use a wide variety of strategies to identify and build relationships with local employers. As Figure 13 shows, there are several common strategies, used by 90 percent or more of the schools, including targeting and contacting employers directly, engaging employers at networking events in the community, and using existing business networks. Of note, relationships between local employers and community colleges work in both directions, as local employers may initiate contact with community colleges when they have specific training needs. Nearly all community colleges—94 percent—report this type of activity, though such interactions are less common for community colleges located in the rural areas of the state.

Figure 13: How do you find employers to engage with your community college?



Community colleges also rely on their students, alumni, and faculty to find employers to engage with. Around two-thirds to three-quarters of respondents indicate they connect with students and alumni involved with local businesses, tap into businesses they are already assisting in other capacities, or receive referrals from faculty, though faculty referrals are less common for rural community colleges. About half of the community colleges indicate that they receive referrals from other employers in the area, and one-third say they host open houses to connect with local employers, though this latter strategy appears to be more common among New York City area community colleges.

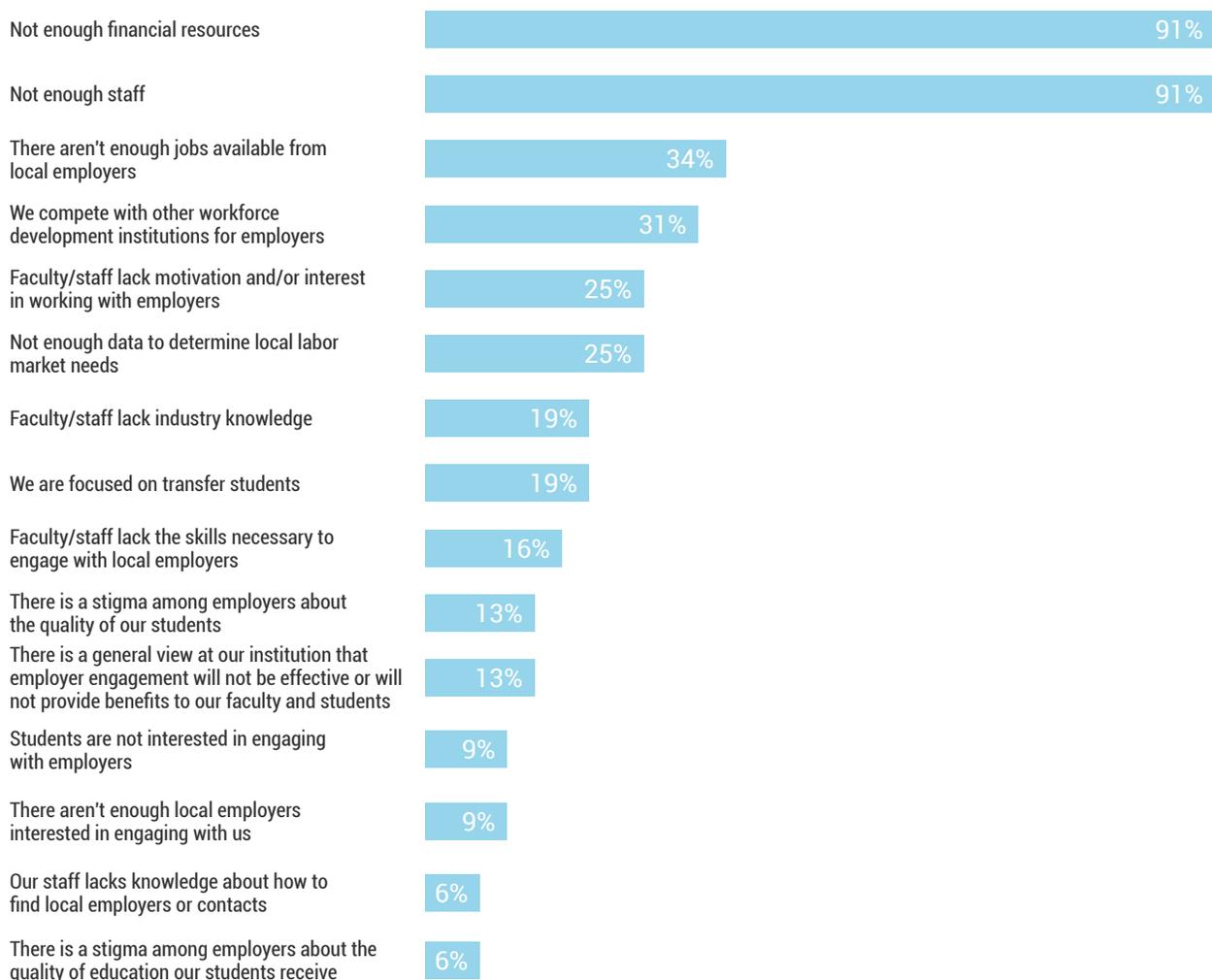
Community colleges also rely on their students, alumni, and faculty to find employers to engage with.

2. Hurdles

Community colleges may face a number of hurdles when it comes to employer engagement. As Figure 14 shows, the top hurdles faced by community colleges in finding employers to engage with, cited by 9 out of 10 schools, are a lack of financial resources and a lack of staff.

Other hurdles faced by community colleges in finding employers are much less common. Roughly one-third of community colleges report that there are not enough jobs available or that they are competing for employers with other workforce development institutions in the local labor market they serve. Moreover, one-fourth of the community colleges in New York State indicate difficulty obtaining information about the needs of the local labor market. Not surprisingly, community colleges serving rural areas of the state are most likely to face the challenges of not having the information necessary to determine local labor market needs and not having enough jobs available from local employers.

Figure 14: What hurdles, if any, do you face in finding employers to engage with your community college?



The top hurdles faced by community colleges in finding employers to engage with are a lack of financial resources and a lack of staff.

Though less common, a focus on academic instruction, as well as the lack of participation among a school's faculty and staff, can also create hurdles to employer engagement. Indeed, one in five schools cited a focus on transfer students as an obstacle they face. Moreover, about 1 in 4 community colleges report that their faculty and staff are not interested in working with employers, and about 20 percent say their faculty and staff lack the industry knowledge or skills necessary to engage with employers.

Finally, we probed whether unfavorable perceptions among employers about community colleges or the students they train created hurdles to employer engagement. While not particularly common, a stigma among employers about the quality of the students coming from community colleges was cited by about 1 in 10 of the community colleges surveyed, while a stigma about the education and training provided to students by community colleges was cited by just six percent. Thus, concern about the quality of students coming from community colleges does not appear to be a major hurdle to employer engagement. However, community colleges located in the New York City area were two to three times more likely to indicate that negative stigmas impeded their employer engagement efforts.

G. Perceived Success and Future Plans

Given the lack of detailed data on employer engagement and labor market outcomes for those students that participate, the survey asked community colleges to assess how well such efforts help their students find jobs and how well employer engagement activities help meet the needs of the local labor market. We also asked community colleges whether they expected to expand or reduce employer engagement going forward.

Community colleges generally rated their employer engagement efforts as moderately successful in terms of both helping their students find jobs in the local economy and helping to meet the needs of their local labor market.

1. Perceived Success

Respondents were asked to rate the success of their community college's employer engagement efforts using a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 considered *not successful* and 10 considered *very successful*. As shown in Figure 15, community colleges generally rated their employer engagement efforts as moderately successful in terms of both helping their students find jobs in the local economy and helping to meet the needs of their local labor market, with an average score of 6.5 on both dimensions. Community colleges located in the upstate New York metropolitan areas tended to give somewhat higher ratings than schools located near New York City or in rural areas of the state.

Figure 15: How successful have your employer engagement efforts been?



The survey also collected comments about methods community colleges use to measure success. A number of community colleges indicated that they track activities such as employer participation on advisory boards, the number of employers who come to campus to interact with faculty and students, the frequency of training requests by local employers, student enrollment in workforce development programs, participation in internships, and the formation of formal employer partnerships with the school. It is also common for community colleges to use surveys and focus groups of students and employers to gauge the success of employer engagement and workforce training. Many community colleges expressed the ultimate need to measure success based on the employment outcomes of their students. To that end, systematically tracking and measuring student placement and longer-term job success were commonly mentioned as important tools for tracking success among community colleges in New York State.

2. Future Plans

Finally, we asked community colleges about their plans for employer engagement going forward. As Figure 16 shows, the vast majority of community colleges in New York State—87 percent—indicated that they expect to increase employer engagement over the next few years. Only 13 percent say that they expect to maintain about the same level of employer engagement, and none reported that they expected to reduce their employer engagement. Schools in rural communities were somewhat more likely to report no change in employer engagement over the next few years.

Figure 16: Over the next three years, how much do you expect your community college to engage with local employers compared to today?



The survey also collected comments about how community colleges plan to increase their employer engagement. A number of schools indicated that they plan to enhance existing relationships with local employers or workforce development organizations in the area. Some examples cited include increasing the number of industry advisory boards, working more closely with local employers to shape the curriculum according to their workforce needs, and providing more opportunities for students to gain other kinds of work experience while still enrolled in school, including internships and co-ops.

The vast majority of community colleges in New York State indicated that they expect to increase employer engagement over the next few years.

Community colleges also indicated that they hope to find new employers in an effort to expand the reach of their engagement efforts. Among the ways they expect to do so were using more targeted communication and doing more networking with local employers by hosting open houses on campus or attending meetings arranged by other local organizations. Some community colleges indicated that they expected to leverage existing employer partnerships to help build relationships with new local employers. Other less common ways community colleges said they expect to expand their employer engagement include making use of government programs such as *Start-Up NY*, providing more research support, and through social media.

To expand their employer engagement efforts, a number of community colleges noted that they expect to increase funding and staffing. Indeed, some community colleges indicated that they plan to reorganize existing staff or add new staff devoted to workforce development and community outreach. A couple of schools reported that they are creating new departments or centers largely for the purpose of fostering relationships with local businesses. In addition, some plan to coordinate across academic departments at their school to more effectively meet the needs of the local labor market. Finally, a number of community colleges indicated that they expect to partner more regularly with local employers to submit grant proposals and identify additional funding opportunities.

Conclusions



Employer engagement has become a powerful tool for community colleges in New York State. By working directly with local employers, community colleges can more effectively prepare students for available jobs *and* help employers find and retain workers with the skills they need. All of the state's community colleges surveyed are involved in employer engagement efforts. Indeed, a typical community college in New York State engages with more than 100 local employers operating across a wide array of industries.

While employer engagement is now widespread among community colleges in New York State, it is important to recognize that each school is situated in a unique economic environment, leading to a variety of strategies for employer engagement and differing levels of success. Given the growing importance of employer engagement in workforce development, information about such efforts is critical in helping all parties involved become more successful going forward. Many strategies are nascent, with new approaches being tried, and it is not clear which strategies work well and which ones do not. Measuring success, particularly through the placement of students and longer-term job success, has become a high priority for community colleges. One goal of this survey is to provide information about these types of efforts as a way to promote more successful employer engagement.

Survey results also indicate that there are some common challenges shared by community colleges in New York State in undertaking employer engagement. In particular, community colleges overwhelmingly report that they do not have enough financial resources or staff to expand their employer engagement efforts. Furthermore, community colleges in rural areas report more widespread roadblocks than those located in the state's metropolitan areas. Understanding these challenges and considering ways to address them can help make more employer engagement possible and foster success. While more research is needed, all indications suggest that employer engagement is a promising and worthwhile endeavor for community colleges, local employers, students, and workers alike.

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