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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
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**HAWAII WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL  
EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**

**AGENDA**

**Date:** January 15, 2026

**Time:** 1:30 p.m.

**In-Person  
Meeting  
Location:** Princess Ruth Ke'elikolani Building  
830 Punchbowl Street, Room 317  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

**Virtual  
Participation:** Virtual Videoconference Meeting – Zoom Meeting (Link below)

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87462175308?pwd=ajst2f04gP9X3MpzYanwaQA44qAtb5.1>

Meeting ID: 874 6217 5308  
Passcode: 653507  
Dial-in: 1 (719) 359-4580

**Agenda:** The agenda was posted to the State electronic calendars as required by §92-7(b), Hawai'i Revised Statutes ("HRS")

**Board Meeting  
Materials:** Meeting materials are available for review at  
<https://labor.hawaii.gov/wdc/meeting-docs/>

Individuals may submit written testimony by hard copy mail or hand delivery to: Attn: Workforce Development Council, 830 Punchbowl Street, Suite 317, Honolulu, HI 96813 or by email at [DLIR.Workforce.Council@hawaii.gov](mailto:DLIR.Workforce.Council@hawaii.gov). We request submission of testimony at least 24 hours prior to the meeting to ensure that it can be distributed to the Board members. Any written testimony submitted after such time will be retained as part of the record and distributed to members as soon as practicable, but we cannot ensure members will receive it in sufficient time to review prior to any decision-making.

**Internet Access:**

To view the meeting and provide live oral testimony, please use the link at the top of the agenda. You will be asked to enter your name. The Board requests that you enter your full name, but you may use a pseudonym or

other identifier if you wish to remain anonymous. You will also be asked for an email address. You may fill in this field with any entry in an email format, e.g., [\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*@\\*\\*\\*mail.com](mailto:*****@***mail.com). Your microphone will be automatically muted, and video will be turned off. When the Chairperson asks for public testimony, you may click the Raise Hand button found on your Zoom screen to indicate that you wish to testify about an agenda item. You will individually be enabled to unmute your microphone, turn on your video if you choose to, and testify. When recognized by the Chairperson, please unmute your microphone and turn on your video if you choose to before speaking and mute your microphone and turn off your video after you finish speaking

#### **Phone Access:**

If you do not have internet access, you may get audio-only access by calling the Zoom Phone Number listed at the top on the agenda. Upon dialing the number, you will be prompted to enter the Meeting ID which is also listed at the top of the agenda. After entering the Meeting ID, you will be asked to wait to be admitted into the meeting. When the Chairperson asks for public testimony, you may indicate you want to testify by entering “\*” and then “9” on your phone’s keypad. After entering “\*” and then “9”, a voice prompt will let you know that the host of the meeting has been notified. When recognized by the Chairperson, you may unmute yourself by pressing “\*” and then “6” on your phone. A voice prompt will let you know that you are unmuted. Once you are finished speaking, please enter “\*” and then “6” again to mute yourself.

For both internet and phone access, when testifying, you will be asked to identify yourself and the organization, if any, that you represent. Each testifier will be limited to five minutes of testimony per agenda item. Pursuant to section 92-3.7(e), HRS, the Board may remove or block any person who willfully disrupts or compromises the conduct of the meeting.

If connection to the meeting is lost for more than 30 minutes, the meeting will be continued on a specified date and time. This information will be provided on the Council’s website at <https://labor.hawaii.gov/wdc/meeting-docs/>.

Instructions to attend State of Hawaii virtual board meetings may be found online at <https://labor.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/State-of-Hawaii-Virtual-Board-Attendee-Instructions.pdf>.

#### Vision Statement

The Workforce Development Council’s vision is that all employers have competitively skilled employees and all residents seeking work or advancement have sustainable employment and self-sufficiency.

#### Mission Statement

It is the intent of the Workforce Development Council to support and guide the implementation of the Unified State Plan through active collaboration and regional sensitivity for the purpose of aligning, coordinating, and integrating workforce services to meet the needs of employers and residents in order to foster a robust economy.

- I. Call to Order..... Gina Anonuevo, Chair of the Employer Engagement Committee
- II. Approval of April 16, 2025, Meeting Minutes
- III. Presentation from the Tennessee Workforce Development Board  
**Deniece Thomas**, Commissioner, Labor and Workforce Development  
Commissioner Denice Thomas will highlight how the State of Tennessee has positioned itself as a national leader in employer engagement by aligning state resources to the full business life cycle. She will discuss the state’s comprehensive Employer Guide, which details support available from startup and growth through expansion, maturity, contraction, and even closure.

The presentation will showcase how employers can access training, recruitment services, talent-pipeline strategies, networking opportunities, and guidance through complex regulatory requirements — all designed to strengthen businesses and the workforce that supports them.

IV. Presentation from American Job Center Hawaii, WorkHawaii's Business Services Team  
**Earl Kalani, Workforce Engagement & Recruitment Specialist**

This presentation will spotlight O'ahu's unique approach to employer engagement, led by the Business Unit within WorkHawaii — the only local workforce board in the state with a dedicated outreach team. The presentation will walk through how the unit builds relationships with local employers, creates on-the-job training opportunities, and leverages WIOA funds to meet business and workforce needs. Participants will gain practical insight into the "nuts and bolts" of sustained employer outreach, with an eye toward replicating and expanding these strategies across other local workforce development boards.

V. Executive Director's Report

The Executive Director will cover the following topics:

1. Modification of the State Unified Plan (In order to continue to receive federal funds, the State of Hawaii needs to submit its strategic plan every four years, with a modification plan due every two years. The Modification Plan is due March or April of this year. The Executive Director will provide a status report of the coordination efforts with the core partners under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).)
2. Implementation of the Generational Commitment (Hawai'i North Star): There will be a webinar series in January and February which will feature several states who are going through a transformational journey to achieve their workforce development objectives. The details of the series will be provided.
3. Internship Summit on March 4, 2026: The Workforce Development Council in collaboration with other workforce partners will hold the first ever Hawai'i Internship Summit on March 4, 2026, from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm at the Japanese Cultural Center. Details on the agenda and other pertinent details will be shared.
4. Internship Excellence Awards: The award recognizes the outstanding programs and participants from both the Hele Imua internship program as well as the non-governmental sectors (private businesses and non-profits). Details of the award categories as well as the nomination process will be shared.

VI. Strategic Discussions on Committee Priorities for 2026

With new committee leadership, it is important to clearly redefine the committee's parameters and areas of responsibility, so all members share a common understanding. This agenda item will invite committee members to provide input on priorities, direction, and key activities moving forward.

VII. Next Meeting  
Scheduled for Tuesday, April 16, 2026, 1:30 p.m.

VIII. Adjournment

Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. Requests for accommodations should be submitted via email to [Bennette.E.Misalucha@hawaii.gov](mailto:Bennette.E.Misalucha@hawaii.gov) or by calling Bennette Misalucha at (808) 586- 3018 (voice) as soon as possible. Such requests should include a detailed description of the accommodation needed. In addition, please include a way for Bennette Misalucha to contact the requester if more information is needed to fulfill the request. Last minute requests will be accepted but may not be possible to accommodate. Upon request, this notice is available in alternate formats.



Deniece Thomas  
**Commissioner**  
*Labor and Workforce Development*

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## About the Commissioner

Governor Bill Lee appointed Deniece Thomas as Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development in September 2022.

Before her appointment, Commissioner Thomas had served as the agency's Deputy Commissioner since 2019. She started her career with the state of Tennessee in 2007 working in the Clarksville American Job Center. Over the years, Commissioner Thomas has risen through the ranks of the Department as a Director, Assistant Administrator, Assistant Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner.

Commissioner Thomas is a member of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) where she serves as co-chair for Workforce ITSC, previous chair of the Employment and Training Committee, past member of both the Veterans Committee since 2015 and the National Apprenticeship Workgroup.

Additionally, she also serves as the State Workforce Liaison for the National Governor's Association where she serves on the Executive Committee. She also serves as a member of the Tennessee Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations.

Commissioner Thomas is a 2014 Graduate of LEAD Tennessee Alliance 5 and Leadership Tennessee Class VIII. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Civic Leadership from Lipscomb University in Nashville and a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Alabama Birmingham.

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**ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Wednesday, April 16, 2025**  
**1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**In-person and online via Zoom**

#### **WRITTEN SUMMARY**

#### **MEMBERS:**

Derek Kanehira – Chair, Employer Engagement Committee; Senior VP, Human Resources, Alexander & Baldwin  
Sean Knox – President, Hawaii Employment Services, Inc.  
Trang Malone – Manager, Workforce Initiatives, CVS Health  
Cheryl Cross – Executive Search Consultant, Inkinen Executive Search  
Rosella Guardascione – Chair, Hawaii County Workforce Development Board  
Lea Dias – Administrator, Department of Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Thomas Chock – Program Specialist, DBEDT (Designee for Director James Tokioka)

#### **GUESTS:**

Mark Menard – Business Services Coordinator, American Job Center Hawaii  
Dana DeSoto – Work-based Learning Coordinator, Vibrant Hawaii  
Corey Reincke – Administrator, Hawaii Proland Authority  
Paul Chen – First Hawaiian Bank  
Nicolette van der Lee – Workforce Program Manager, UH Community College System  
Crystal Garan – Business Services Coordinator, Workaway Youth Program  
Debbie Leong-Yep – University Health Alliance (UHA)  
Jasmine Francisco – Talent Acquisition Manager, Marriott International  
Christine Beaule – Director of Workforce Development, University of Hawaii System  
Matt Stevens – Executive Director, Hawaii Workforce Funders Collaborative

#### **STAFF:**

Bennette Misalucha – Executive Director, Workforce Development Council  
Evan Palmer – Program Specialist, Workforce Development Council

## **I. Call to Order [Video 00:30:38] by Derek Kanehira, Chair**

Derek Kanehira called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. and confirmed it was a public meeting under the open meeting law.

## **II. A Panel Discussion on Breaking Barriers: Real Talk from Employers [Video 00:17:23] facilitated by Mark Menard, Business Services Coordinator, American Job Center**

Mark Menard facilitated a panel discussion featuring three employers sharing their experiences partnering with American Job Centers. The panelists discussed their initial hesitations, the partnership process, and workforce development outcomes.

**[Video 00:19:48] by David Makilan, HAHOKO** David shared how HAHOKO utilized the QUEST internship program to hire 14-15 individuals as interns and employ 10 as full-time staff, marking the organization's first W-2s in its 13-year history.

**[Video 00:21:05] by Charlie Yoshimoto, Bank of Hawaii** Charlie described Bank of Hawaii's successful participation in American Job Center hiring events since 2022, consistently making job offers at every event with strong return on investment.

**[Video 00:23:23] by Roz Funakoshi, Samurai Incorporated** Roz explained her food manufacturing company's partnership with AJC for nearly a year, successfully utilizing QUEST and On-the-Job Training programs despite initial hesitations about government bureaucracy.

## **III. Update on the Workforce Opportunity Tax Credit [Video 01:20:51] by Derek Kanehira, Chair**

Maricar Pilotin Freitas was scheduled to provide an update on WOTC application backlog but was unavailable for the meeting.

## **IV. Executive Director's Report [Video 01:21:15] by Bennette Misalucha, Executive Director, Workforce Development Council**

Bennette provided updates on unified plan implementation, agency transition status, and unexpended funds projects. She reported on the National Governors Association grant for developing a North Star and the planned July 2025 synergy summit.

## **V. Announcements and Constituent Comments (if any) [Video 01:25:05] by Derek Kanehira, Chair**

No announcements or comments were made.

## **VI. Next Meeting [Video 01:25:33] by Derek Kanehira, Chair**

The next meeting for the Employer Engagement Committee is scheduled for July 16, 2025 at 1:30 pm on Zoom and at the DLIR building.

## **VII. Adjournment [Video 01:25:44] by Derek Kanehira, Chair**

Derek Kanehira adjourned the meeting at 2:51 p.m.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program

Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

TDD/TTY Dial 711 then ask for (808) 586-8877

# LEVEL UP <sup>with ↑</sup> **WORKHAWA'I**

American Job Center Hawai'i

**BUSINESS SERVICES**  
**How We Empower Employers**

*January 15, 2026 ~ Earl Kalani*



American Job Center  
HAWAII





# WELCOME AND INTRO

- WHO WE ARE

- WorkHawai'i-American Job Center Hawai'i
- Workforce development, employers and job seeker resources



TEAM WORKHAWAI'I



JOB READINESS  
PREPARATION  
PROGRAMS



WORKHAWAI'I  
ADULT PROGRAMS



WORKHAWAI'I  
YOUTH PROGRAM



JUVENILE JUSTICE  
CENTER



RENT TO WORK



# EMPLOYER FLOW

## Employer learns about our services

Word of mouth, cold calls, Hiring Events, etc

## Employer Interest Form

Employer and Business Services Team receive auto-reply

## Interest reviewed

Form responses addressed and directed daily

## Individualized services dispensed

Hiring Event services, internships, on-the-job training, etc.



# EMPLOYER INTEREST FORM

Our first contact with employers...



## Interest Form for Employers

Which services(s) are you interested in? \*

- Become a worksite for our internship placement program
- Become a worksite for our On-the-Job Training program
- Attend our Hiring Events as an employer

What is the name of your organization? \*

What is the name of your primary point of contact (POC)? \*

What is the title of your POC? \*



# WHAT WE OFFER

**Single-Employer and Mass Hiring Events**



**Internships and On-The-Job Training**



**Direct Hiring and Job-Seeker Networks**

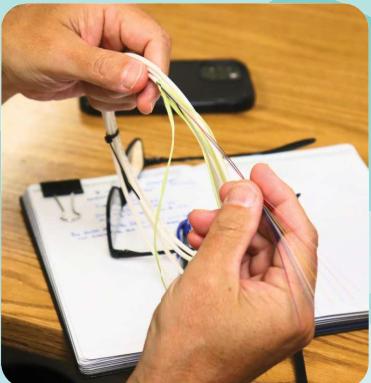


**Ongoing resources and support**



# HIRING EVENTS

- No cost to employers
- Job seeker access
- Two annual mass events
- Single-employer events at our office upon request



## HIRING EVENTS

[Honolulu.gov/HiringEvents](https://Honolulu.gov/HiringEvents)





# WORK EXPERIENCE



## Internships



## On-the-Job Training

- **STRUCTURE:**

- 1-3 month paid internship for job seekers to evaluate the role and worksite
- OJT period for employers to provide job-specific training with financial support to offset training and productivity costs as the new employee gets up to speed

- **BENEFITS TO JOB SEEKERS:**

- Test candidates before hiring, develop future employees through structured training, reduce turnover, and receive government-funded support for training costs



# HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER

- **CORE SIMILARITIES**

- Both programs structured identically with OJT as core similarities
  - Employers provide job-specific training
- Both programs offer reimbursement to offset training costs

- **KEY DIFFERENCES**

- Internship+OJT
  - Targets adult customers or those who are more advanced in their career journey
- WEX+OJT
  - Focuses on providing foundational job skills to youth to prep for workforce

- **EMPLOYER BENEFITS**

- Access to motivated talent from different age demographics
- Create long-term employee retention by ensuring a good fit before potential hiring





# PARTNERSHIPS

## Résumé Workshop

### ***Prepare for the Career Expo!***

Join us for a free, hands-on Résumé Workshop to help you create, update, and print your résumé before attending the Career Expo at the Neal Blaisdell Center Exhibition Hall.

**Attend any of our four FREE sessions!**

Monday, January 26, 2026

Tuesday, January 27, 2026

10:00AM-12:00PM, 1:00PM-3:00PM

***Dole Cannery Office Building***

***680 Iwilei Rd, Suite 700, Honolulu, HI 96817***

***(808) 768-5706***

***Leiala.Cook@honolulu.gov***



# SUCCESS STORIES



**KIPAS ELIAS**  
*Work experience and OJT  
with Re-Use Hawai'i*



# MAHALO!



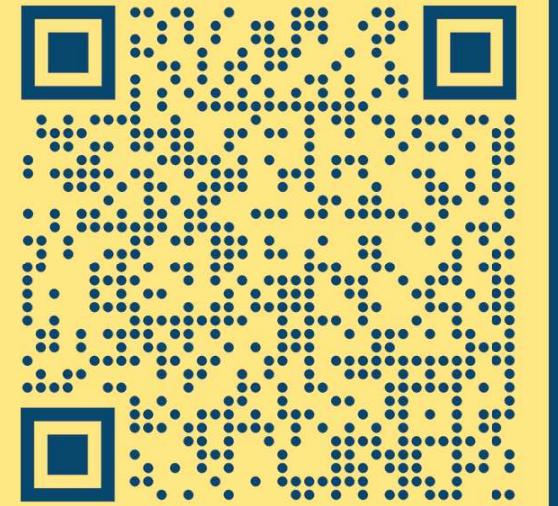
**Open Enrollment  
(808) 768-5896**

**EmployerServicesWH@honolulu.gov**

Dole Cannery Office Building  
680 Iwilei Rd, Suite 700, Honolulu, HI 96817  
Mon-Fri 7:45-4:30

**EMPLOYER SERVICES  
PAGE**

[www.honolulu.gov/dcs/  
business-services](http://www.honolulu.gov/dcs/business-services)





# Executive Director's Report

Employer Engagement Committee  
Thursday, January 15, 2026

Bennette E. Misalucha



# Agenda

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Update on Unified Plan Implementation

Status of the Modified State Plan

Focus for First Quarter 2026/Events

# Update on Unified Plan Implementation

- Four Pillar Catalyst Teams will evolve into the Generational Commitment values of Learn, Work, Thrive and Belong
- Community-Driven Effort led by the Hawaii Funders Collaborative and the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii
- Lessons Learned from Other States Webinar Series
- Timeline for Implementation



# Modification of Unified Plan

- Background: Every two years, the State Unified Plan needs to be updated.
- Status of Guidance Letter from Department of Labor
- Working with core partners efforts
- Due date: TBD
- But need Board approval/ February 18, 20206 Board Meeting(?)

# Hawaii State Unified Plan Timeline



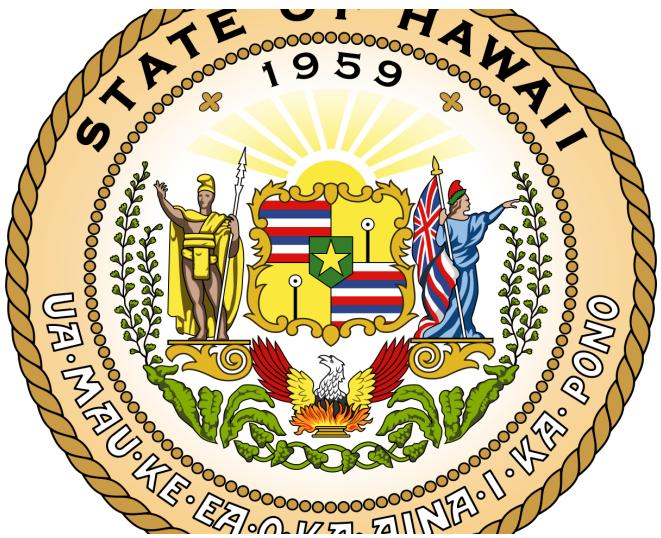
# FOCUS IN 2026

## First Quarter

- First Annual Hawaii Internship Summit 2026
- Internship Excellence Awards
- Workforce Pell Working Group
- Legislative Matters
- Operational Transition on pertinent WIOA roles
- Implementation of Unified Plan/collaboration with Hui stakeholders
- Building Strategic Alliances with key community organizations
- Procurement of Services for Research and Grants
- Staff Training and Transition.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

- **January 15, 2026** at 1:30 pm: Presentation from the State of Tennessee on best practices for employer engagement
- **January 17, 2026** : launch of the Internship Excellence Awards
- **January 23, 2026** at 9:30 am: Webinar Series: National Governor's Association
- **January 30, 2026** at 9:30 am: Webinar Series: Presentation from the State of Maine
- **February 4, 2026** at 9:30 am: Webinar Series: Presentation from the State of North Dakota
- **February 13, 2026** at 9:30 am: Webinar Series: Presentation from the State of North Carolina
- **February 18, 2026** at 9:30 am: WDC Quarterly Board Meeting
- **March 4, 2026** at 8:30 am to 3 pm: First Annual Hawaii Internship Summit at Japanese Cultural Center



## Workforce Development Council

MAHALO!



# Employer Engagement Committee

Roles and Responsibilities

# Conduct Regular Industry Needs Assessments

Regularly survey and consult with industry sectors to understand evolving labor market demands. This approach can identify critical skill gaps, new technologies, and emerging job roles.

Engage with employers, trade associations, and chambers of commerce to gather real-time feedback on workforce requirements and to adapt training programs accordingly.

# Develop Sector-Based Partnerships

Establish sector-based partnerships that align workforce training and development initiatives with key industries identified in the state's economic development strategy. This would include sectors such as healthcare, technology, construction, and tourism.

Create sector councils or advisory groups to ensure ongoing dialogue between employers and workforce development agencies. These groups can serve as platforms to review labor trends, prioritize training efforts, and adjust curricula to meet industry-specific needs.

# Use Labor Market Information (LMI) Effectively

Leverage LMI to forecast labor demand, highlight in-demand occupations, and adjust training programs to match projected job growth. Workforce development programs should be data-driven, focusing on areas that promise sustainable employment opportunities.

Collaborate with economic development agencies to jointly analyze and disseminate LMI, making it accessible to training providers, job seekers, and employers to inform decisions.

# Align Workforce Programs with Economic Plans

Review and align workforce programs with the state's economic development plans, such as the Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Plan or other state-driven growth strategies.

Ensure that workforce investment strategies reflect economic priorities, particularly in terms of high-growth sectors and regions with significant development potential.

# Collaborating Directly in Curriculum Design

Employers can actively participate in the design of educational and training curricula. By working with educational institutions and training providers, employers can offer insights into the specific skills, competencies, and knowledge that are in high demand.

Employers can provide real-world case studies, tools, and technologies used in the workplace to ensure that curricula are not only theoretical but also aligned with practical, industry-relevant applications.

Additionally, employers can help adjust training content to emerging trends, such as digital skills, green technologies, or industry-specific software, ensuring that the workforce remains current and adaptable.

# Offering Structured Internships and Apprenticeships

Employers play a crucial role by providing structured internship and apprenticeship opportunities that align with industry needs. These programs offer students and trainees hands-on experiences that enhance their skills in real-world settings.

By clearly defining the roles, expectations, and learning outcomes of these opportunities, employers ensure that participants gain practical skills that translate directly into workforce readiness.

Employers can also establish formal mentorship programs within internships and apprenticeships, enabling trainees to gain valuable guidance and industry insights from seasoned professionals.

# Providing Feedback and Adjusting Training Programs

Employers can provide continuous feedback to education and training providers regarding the effectiveness of curricula, skills gaps observed among new hires, and areas for improvement. By serving on advisory boards or councils for training programs, employers can help guide revisions and updates to ensure that training programs keep pace with changing industry demands.

This feedback loop ensures that programs remain agile and can be adjusted quickly to match labor market shifts, such as new technologies, regulatory changes, or shifts in consumer demand.

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# Championing Career Pathways and Skill Development

Employers can play an active role in developing career pathways that start with entry-level roles and provide clear, defined routes for advancement. By sharing these pathways with training providers, curricula can be designed to align with the skills and competencies needed at each career stage.

This approach encourages workers to view training as part of a long-term career strategy, increasing both employee retention and skill acquisition within the industry.

# Engaging in Public-Private Partnerships

Employers can collaborate with government agencies and educational institutions to establish public-private partnerships that ensure resources are shared, curricula align with industry standards, and training programs receive ongoing support.

Such partnerships can also facilitate funding opportunities, equipment donations, and scholarships, enhancing access to training and encouraging diverse talent pipelines.

## Summary:

Build and maintain direct working relationships with employers and associations to understand needs and support program delivery.

What do employers need right now — and how do we respond quickly?