

Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development

Collaborative

Event 3 – Cochise



The **Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative** is the Arizona Department of Education's opportunity to strengthen communication and collaboration among employers and community partners, and to gather their feedback with a concentrated focus on developing a strategic talent pipeline with regional Career Technical Education (CTE) and Adult Education programs. The work of the regional collaboratives is an effort to address the regional CTE Superintendent's and CTE directors' challenges and connect CTE programs, and the post-secondary and adult education programs to align more closely with the regional and statewide industry workforce needs.

To facilitate these workforce goals, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) will plan and deliver eleven collaborative meetings throughout 2025 with every county in Arizona. These meetings will be held in partnership with District Superintendents, CTE Work-Based Learning Directors, CTE Directors, Arizona Adult Education Programs, Community Colleges, Workforce agencies, Economic Development Partners, and Industry Leaders. The meetings include presentations from the venue host, ADE leadership staff, and members from regional economic development organizations. The meetings include roundtable discussions with attendees focused on current partnerships and recommendations to strengthen or to develop talent pipelines and to create Work-Based Learning activities with regional employers with CTE and Adult Education Programs.

Information will be collected from each of the regional roundtable discussions and a follow-up survey will be sent to meeting attendees. This information will be compiled and is included in this report.

The Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative – Cochise

On March 26, 2025, ADE held the second of 10 events in Cochise County and sponsored by Cochise College.

Location:

Cochise College Sierra Vista Campus

901 North Colombo Avenue, Serra Vista AZ

Time: 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

64 people were invited to the meeting, 38 registered, and 33 people attended. The event was arranged to encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue and to create an environment for innovative ideas and partnerships.

Attendees were from the following organizations:

Bisbee UHSD	Tombstone UHSD	CTD - Cochise Technology District
Buena High School	Sky Islands Regional Partnership	Arizona Regional Economic Development
Center for the Future of Arizona	Arizona@Work Southeastern AZ	Cochise Community College
Santa Cruz County Provisional Community College	Wayland Baptist University	Empire CAT
AZMining	Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative	Arizona Science Center
AZ Dept of Corrections, Rehabilitation & Reentry	Jackson Veterinary Services	Northrop Grumman
Douglas High School	Arizona Department of Education	

Feedback from the Meeting

To encourage opportunities for improvement, ADE presented four questions. These questions will be the same at each of the 10 events to enable a comparison of responses received across the state. This will also be useful in providing information for other projects. The design of each question was predicated on inquiries ADE receives from community stakeholders, school leaders, and industries. The questions were:

1. What Work-based Learning (WBL)/Apprenticeship opportunities are currently taking place in your organization/community?
2. Based on economic development information, what gaps in your school/college need to be addressed to develop a talented pipeline to meet employment needs?
3. Who else from this community needs to be involved in this discussion?
4. What are the next steps?

Question Number One:

What WBL/Apprenticeships opportunities are currently taking place in your organization/community? The responses were diversified as the respondents covered the spectrum of WBL and Apprenticeship experiences. The most mentioned activity is paid in person internships. Paid internships are a win, win for the student and the employer; it allows the student to be compensated while learning from the company itself. This method is very popular and hard to get in a rural region. A deeper dive to understand how the internship programs are organized and managed by the schools and companies will help with program creation and improvement in other areas.

Additional responses to other activities and work-based learning techniques were mentioned. Although a few of the activity or program definitions provided may not be specifically WBL or apprenticeship programs, they did show the willingness to create meaningful programs that connect students with career development. The takeaway is that there are many opportunities for work-based learning and career development aside from the recognized programs. The region is unique as to its location and often must be creative with the opportunities available that will provide the best outcomes for the students. Below are the types of programs and mention count as provided by the participants.

Paid In-Person Internships - 4

Registered Apprenticeships – 2

Unpaid In-Person Internships – 2

Paid Virtual Internships – 2

Unpaid Virtual Internships – 2

6-9th Grade Career Exploration Curriculum – 1

County Certificate Program for First Aid and Blue Stake – 1

Career Tours at Company Sites – 1

Professional Youth Quest – 1

Big Idea Blitz Pitch Competition – 1

Hiring our Heros Program for Veterans – 1

UACI Student Incubator – 1

GED Prep - 1

Functional Literacy Program – 1

Work Based Learning in Construction – 1

Integrated Education and Training Programs – 1

Business / Industry Working Partnership Opportunity – 1

Moonshot AZ Entrepreneur Training Program – 1

Question Number Two:

Based on economic development info, what are the gaps in your school/college that need to be addressed in order to develop a talent pipeline to meet employment needs? Responses from this question are annotated in three categories:

- Industry / School Connection
- Program Gaps
- Partnerships

Industry / School Connection refers to program alignment between the CTE and/or community college, adult education programs, and industry/employers. The comments reflect the attendee's perceptions and experiences with CTE programs or CTE students or community colleges. Program gaps are perceived or experienced deficiencies, challenges, or feedback on the performance of CTE or community college programs or the makeup of the students in these programs. Partnerships are proposed or perceived gaps in collaboration, communication, or awareness of CTE programs or post-secondary opportunities.

The purpose of incorporating the whole workforce development ecosystem in these round table conversations is to discover room for improvement or challenges experienced by these partners. The information provided was expressed by the participants. (See comments below)

Industry / School
Connection

- State Support for CTE program certificates
- Connect with employers
- Focus on high paying career, sustain and create pathway
- How do we excite future workforce?
- Teacher industry instructor, build the industry with school connections
- Industry connection, bridge the gap between entry level and experienced workers
- Statewide workforce needs with local training
- Schools should focus on filling classes, courses for retail, higher employment pay
- Workforce is different then it was a few years ago
- Skilled Trades Day; industry leaders visit classes to interact with students (career exploration)
- Industry should provide more

Partnership

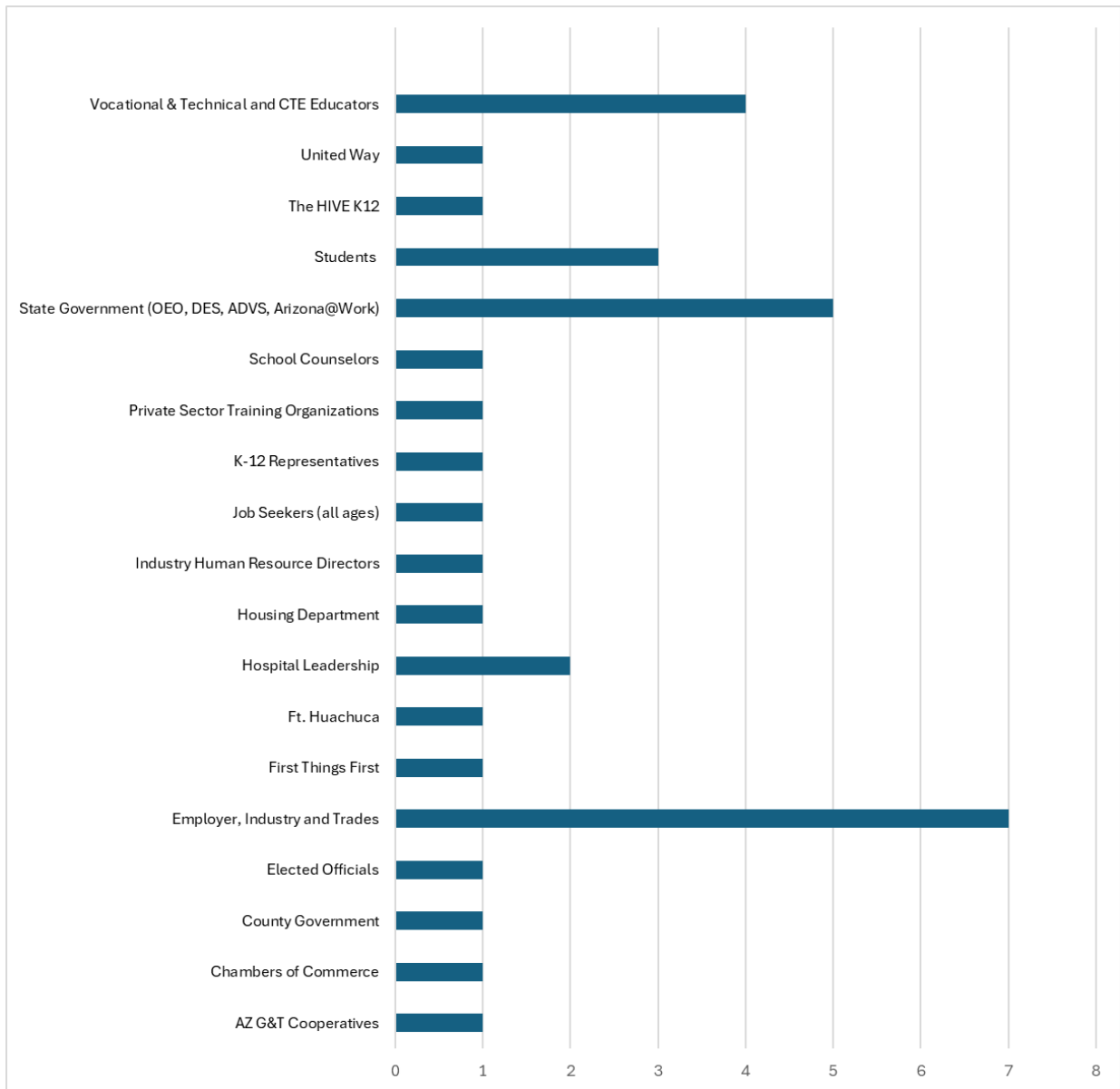
- Collaborate with college to create degree programs that produces the most transferable credits
- Support dual enrollment
- Work with Arizona@Work in Adult education, integrated education and training programs
- Partner with Arizona@Work on the job training programs
- Expose students to what is available at Cochise College

Program

- Need enhanced apprenticeship / journeymen programs
- Need more STEM (R&D, modeling, analysis) opportunities
- Pay rate for trainers is not competitive
- High School curriculum doesn't match workplace standards
- Need more integrated education and training programs
- English as a 2nd language has barriers
- Need more work-based learning opportunities
- Change the "must go to college to be successful" message
- Provide clear messaging about available opportunities and a central place to find them
- Teachers lack knowledge for jobs/ training
- Filling employment needs NOT learning what students want first
- The feeling that whatever degree / certificate they choose is a final decision
- Students not wanting to work on an office
- Teachers high turnover rate (burnout etc.)
- Students are inexperienced in heavy equipment realistic environment
- Need for sustainable program funding and enhance employability skills
- Soft / professional skill needed

Question Number Three:

Who else from this community needs to be involved in this discussion? This question asks the attendees about their perspective on who additionally would benefit from attending the event. Although there were representatives present from most of these organizations and every organization mentioned was invited, the desire to have more representation was apparent. The category with the most interest that was identified to be critical for these types of discussions are employers, industry professionals and trades. The second is state government agencies in the workforce or social services. The table below displays the responses.



Question Number Four:

What are the next steps?" From the information collected, what should these next steps be? This question explores from the perspective of the attendees what they have learned and what they are experiencing, what the next steps can be or what they are interested in exploring. Below are the comments provided.

- Continue engagement
- Include a bigger community population - consider off hours for meetings, add parent / child panels in the discussion
- Map what is happening (DYNAMIC), so many organizations and people doing things and maybe doing the same things
- Connect and engage employers, expand on existing connections
- Start more conversations, create a marketing plan to present to businesses about internship programs
- Continue networking, commit, and follow through
- Accountability steps with large groups in rural areas-speak with students in person and virtual, how to be successful in career pathway (coaching)
- Input to an actionable plan
- Follow-up with people in attendance

The Survey

As stated, the purpose of the meeting was to gather information from the region regarding CTE and Adult Education Programs. In addition to the roundtable discussion and presentations, ADE distributed a survey to all attendees. The survey was designed to capture more feedback on the programs and ideas and use the comments to develop an actionable plan. Another objective was to discover who the participants would prefer to continue the conversation to address barriers or enhancements to CTE, Adult Education programs. We sent the survey to every participant after the Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative meeting. The survey asked the following seven questions.

1. Based on what you have learned how likely are you going to start (or change) a work-based learning opportunity?
2. What do you need to know more about to participate in a successful WBL program (select up to three)?
3. What are the main benefits of partnering with CTE programs?
4. Which partnerships would you like to expand or learn more about (select all that apply)?
5. Who should lead this conversation going forward? (Select Two).
6. What industry-education partnerships or initiatives are currently operating in your area?
7. How valuable was the event to you or your organization?

Of the 33 people who attended the event, 14 (43%) responded to the survey. It is common that survey participation can range from 25-30%, 43% is a positive indicator.

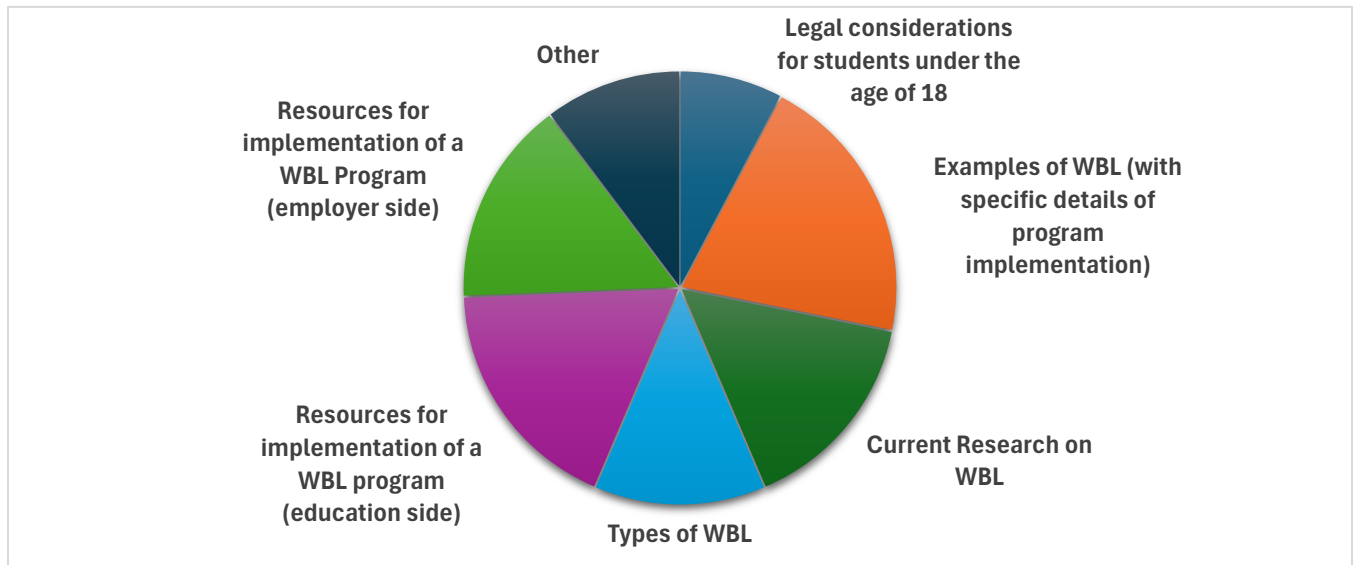
Question Number One:

Based on what you have learned, how likely are you going to start (or change) a work-based learning opportunity? The results were based on a 1-to-5 criteria, with one representing least likely and five representing most likely. The average rating of 3.85 indicates that most participants either plan to begin or continue engaging in work-based learning (WBL) programs or opportunities. However, the survey comments and feedback suggest that a lack of information about WBL methods and their impact may undermine participants' confidence in the concept.

Question Number Two:

What do you need to know more about to participate in a successful WBL program (select up to three)? The findings indicate a clear need for more accessible information on resources to support the implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) programs, from both employer and educator perspectives. A common challenge is the lack of clear communication regarding program funding and financial support for

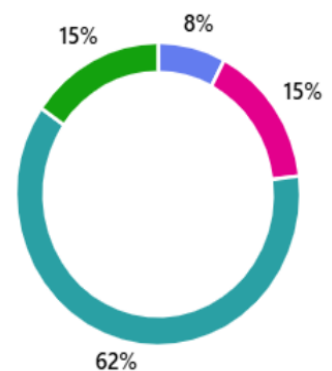
participating companies, especially when compared to other states where such support is more readily available. Another significant concern is the difficulty in locating detailed examples of successful WBL programs and best practices. Efforts are currently underway to improve statewide communication of program guidelines and success stories. Additional insights are presented in the chart below.



Question Number Three:

What are the main benefits for partnering with CTE programs? The purpose of this question is to discover from the participant's perspective the benefit of working with a CTE program. The majority responses (62%) said “to provide an economic opportunity for your community.” This indicates the local investment perspective on how the participants value CTE programs. There were two other responses, one of the responses stated “all the above” which indicates their favor for CTE programs. The other reaffirmed the benefit of growing talent locally. (See the graph below.)

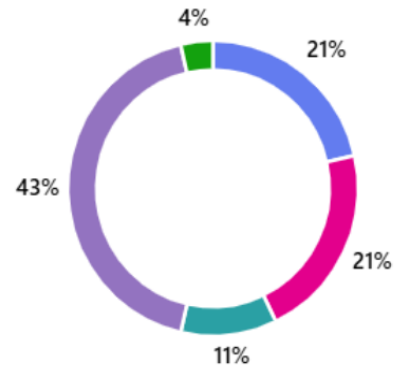
- Fill staffing needs 1
- Enhance student understanding of your industry 2
- Provide an economic opportunity for your community 8
- To grow your organization 0
- Other 2



Question Number Four:

Which partnerships would you like to expand or learn more about? This question had four options: economic development, CTE programs, Community College, and workforce. Attendees were asked to select one answer only. Most of the participants selected the Workforce (43%), second was economic development (21%), and CTE programs (21%). One attendee selected Other and wrote in Micro – Internships. There is a growing interest in all variations of internships, as they are easier to manage and develop.

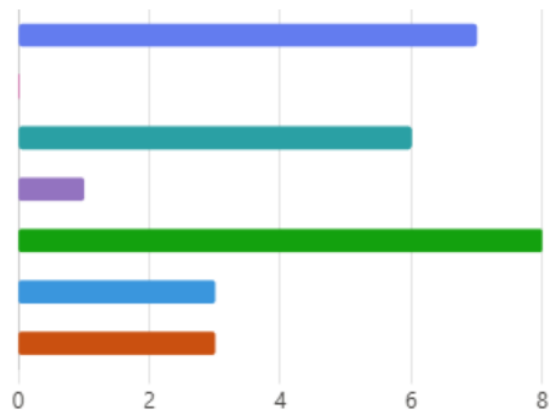
● Economic Development	6
● CTE Programs	6
● Community College	3
● Workforce	12
● Other	1



Question Number Five:

Who should lead this conversation going forward? This question aimed to gather participants' insights on who should lead the ongoing ecosystem collaboration discussions, manage the detailed efforts to enhance student employment opportunities, and support workforce talent pipeline development. Respondents overwhelmingly favored the local workforce development board as the top choice, followed closely by local economic development organizations, while the local school district was deemed the least likely option. (See the graph below.)

● Local economic development organization	7
● Local school district	0
● Local CTED	6
● Local elected officials	1
● Local Workforce Development Board	8
● Local Chamber of Commerce	3
● Other	3



Question Number Six:

What industry-education partnerships or initiatives are currently operating in your area? This question asks the attendees to name the current partnerships in their local region. The importance of this information is to identify existing local partnerships that are already working well. There were a few comments that indicated challenges in establishing partnerships, however, many of the comments indicated that internships are the preferred method of an industry-education partnership. Other comments and current partnership methods are below.

Apprentice programs with mining. Upcoming opportunities with BlackStar Orbital, CAT USA, Arizona G&T.	Externship and Internships with U of A, Pima Medical and Cochise College	Advisory boards for high school CTE programs	Hospitals, SSVEC, Az G and T, City/county government,	AZ @ Work
Partnership with Cochise College nursing program for our high school students.	Occasional Internships, informal and sought out by individual instructors, counselors.	GoBig/ThinkBig w/ Empire-CAT and MCC EVIT	Working apprentice programs with two organizations, early college,	Virtual worker base learning through the Center for the Future of Arizona and the Work Based Learning Alliance
Local farms and our Agriscience Programs in Valley Union, San Simon, and Bowie				

Question Number Seven:

How valuable was the event to you or your organization? This question sought to determine the value of the meeting. Was the meeting meaningful to the attendees or did they feel it was an effective use of their time? Respondents were to answer the question using 1-to-5 scale, with one being not valuable and 5 being most valuable.

A few of the comments collected include “I really appreciate the roadshow and the efforts that the State dedicates to the rural areas”, “It was great to see networking and key players at the table, I just truly hope that we can continue to create true Work Based Learning partnerships with local industry and high school CTE programs that are sustainable”, “I appreciate the AZ Dept of ED commitment to the rural communities”.

57% of the respondents selected 5, indicating the meeting was valuable. The lowest response was from two attendees who rated the event a 3. The total rating was 4.14 out of 5.

Conclusions

Local schools and businesses have shared interest and shared responsibility to the community they serve. Both entities are affected by the outcomes of schooling, which provide students with learning experience that supports their ability to make a measurable contribution to and receive meaningful benefits from the society they will join and lead in the future. The good news is that business, economic development, and local workforce leaders perceive a shared responsibility for and show eagerness to support the work of educating students.