Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative

Event 7 – Coconino

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 twelve 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 between regional employers and 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. The information received is compiled by ADE and included in this report.

The Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative – Coconino County

On October 8, 2025, ADE held the seventh of 12 scheduled events in Coconino County and sponsored by Coconino Community College.

Location:

Coconino Community College

2800 S. Lone Tree Road

Flagstaff, AZ 86005

Time:

11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

192 people were invited to the meeting, 69 registered, and 62 people attended. The event was arranged to encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue and create an environment for innovative ideas and partnerships. Attendees were from the following organizations:

CORE Construction	Unidentified Local Business	Flagstaff Little America
SOBO Associates LLC	Habitat for Humanity of Northern Arizona	EBAY Sales
Little Colorado Medical Center	Coconino Community College	CAVIAT
AZ Office of Economic Opportunity	Center for Future of Arizona	AZ Department of Economic Security
Williams Unified School District	Northern Arizona Healthcare	Sedona Arts Center
Sundt Construction	Flagstaff Unified School District	North County Healthcare
Northern Arizona University	Quality Connections	Page Unified School District
Jobs for Arizona's Graduates (JAG)	Machine Solutions	Independent Insurance Agency
Arizona@Work Eckerd Connects	Coconino County Education Services Agency	AZ 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 12 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 are:

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 talent 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 activities are internship programs and apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships. The apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs are represented by the construction industry. Internship programs are identified mostly from Coconino Community College where internships are built into elective course credits.

Additional responses to other activities and WBL techniques were mentioned. Although some 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 WBL and career development in addition to the recognized programs. Below are the types of programs and mention count as provided by the participants.

Clinicals - 1

Apprenticeships - 2

Electrical apprenticeships – 1

Internships – 8

Freeport-McMoRan internships – 1

WIOA youth work experience (WEX) – 1

Externships – 3

Skillz Up – 1

School-based enterprises – 1

Simulations – 1

Vocational rehab – 1

Quality Connection – 2

Little America internships – 1

Kimmey Construction apprenticeships – 1

Question Number Two:

Based on economic development information, what are the gaps in your school / college that need to be addressed 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 adult education programs, community college, 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

- Seats aren't being filled
- OSHA laws
- Reframing what meaningful careers are
- Credentialing
- Theory vs practical application
- Training for emerging industries
- Pipeline from job shadow to internships
- Insufficient technical training matching industry demands

Partnership

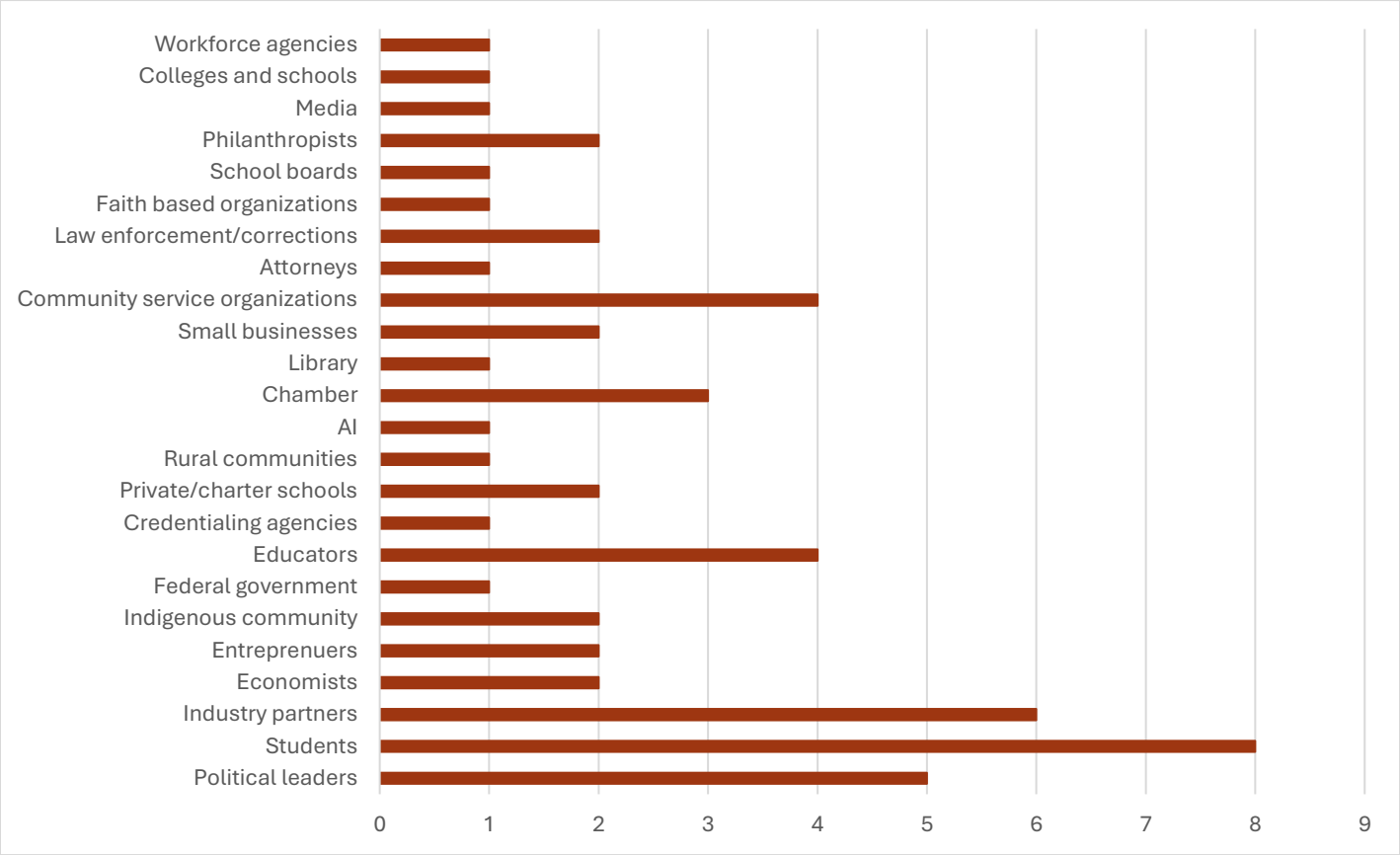
- Dara around CNA programs
- Knowledge of resources and who has them
- Paid opportunities for students
- Access to information about programs
- Good connections between education and employers
- Institutional collaboration
- Small business engagement

Program

- Barriers to placement exams
- Housing and childcare barriers
- Transportation barriers
- Barriers to internet access
- Lack of instructors
- Program capacity
- Soft skills
- Flexibility to create specialized training

Question Number Three:

Who else from this community needs to be involved in this discussion? This question asks the attendees from their perspective, who, not in attendance, would benefit from attending the event. Although there were representatives present from many of these organizations and every organization mentioned was invited, the desire to have more representation was apparent. The populations most identified as critical to include in these discussions are students and industry partners. Others include educators, political leaders, and community services organizations. The table below displays the responses.



Question Number Four:

From the information collected, what should your 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:

- Connect with local workforce board
- Develop HESI prep
- Partner with community college
- Trade business cards and have more conversations
- Share stories of career journeys

- Build road maps for students and employers
- Developing students' professional skills
- Rethink post-secondary education and career readiness.
- Developing mentoring opportunities
- Formal career exploration structure from elementary through high school
- Create industry informational workshops
- Comprehensive needs plan for CTE programs
- Establish systemic collaboration
- Address transportation issues for rural areas
- Explore and map resources

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?

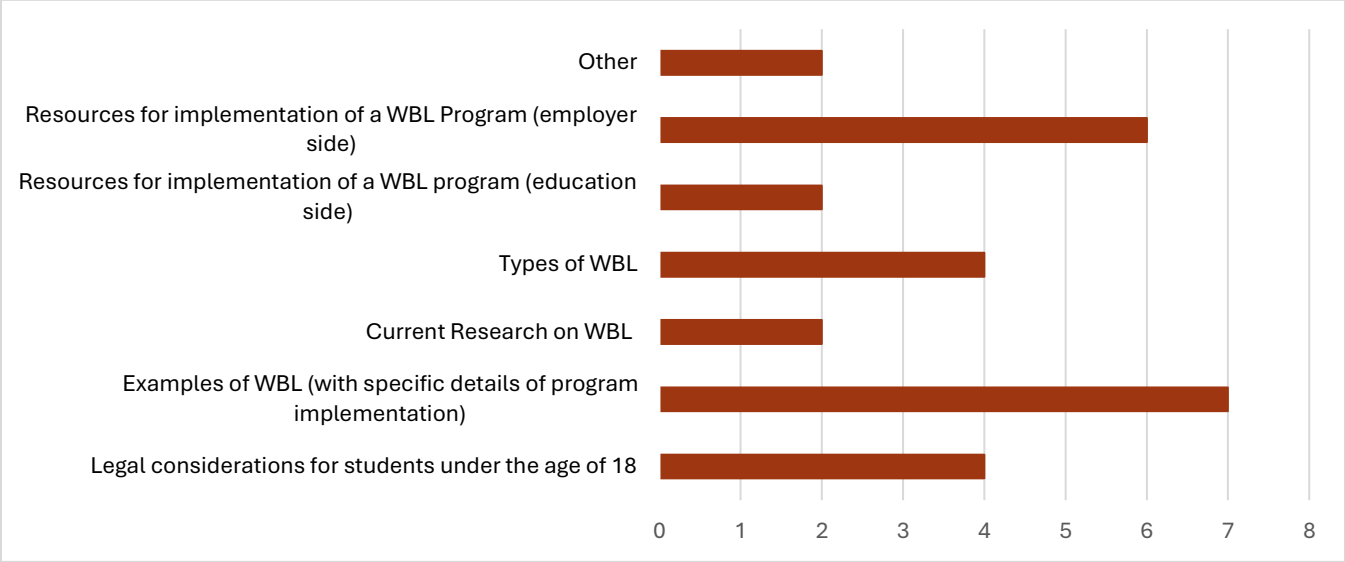
Of the 62 people who attended the event, 9 (15%) responded to the survey. It is common that survey participation ranges from 25-40%, 15% is a low response rate and reminder or follow-up efforts may have increased this number.

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 3.56 (71%) 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. A lack of industry resources was also sited as a barrier to start or change WBL opportunities.

Question Number Two:

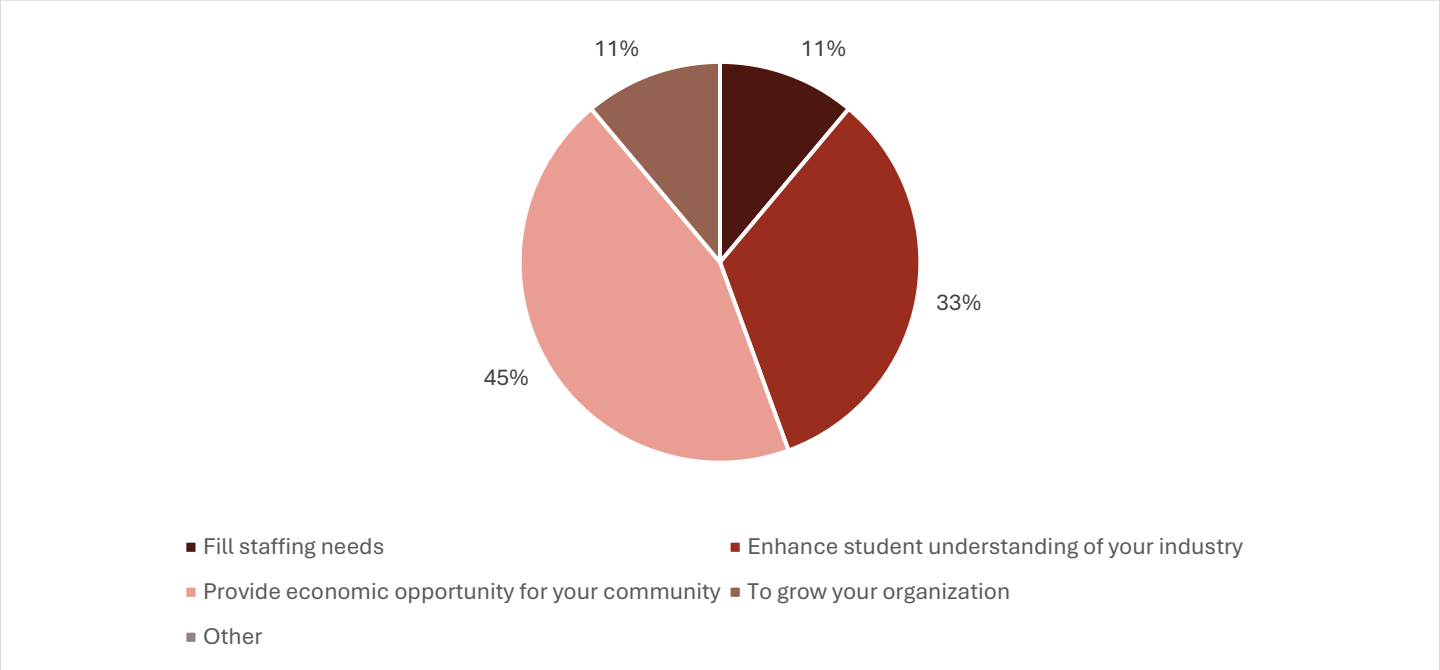
What do you need to know more about to participate in a successful WBL program (select up to three)? The findings indicate a clear need for more transparent information about elements of a successful WBL program and employer resources to develop WBL programs. The top three indicators show that there is a need for examples of a successful WBL program, clarity on what types of WBL are active in the area and what resources are available to support WBL. Participants also stated they need more information about legal considerations for students under 18 years old. 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:

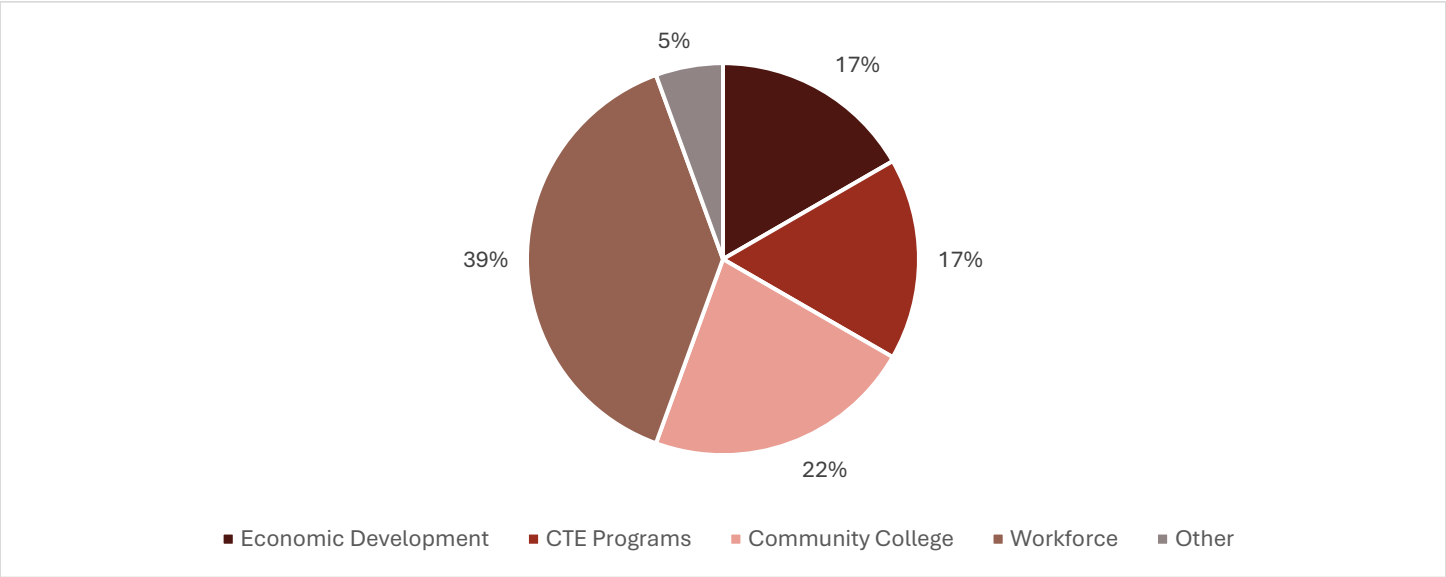
What are the main benefits of partnering with CTE programs? The purpose of this question is to discover from the participant's perspective the benefit of working with a CTE program. The majority responses (45%) said "to provide an economic opportunity for your community." This indicates the local investment perspective on how the

participants value CTE programs and an understanding that CTE programs add value to workforce and economic development.



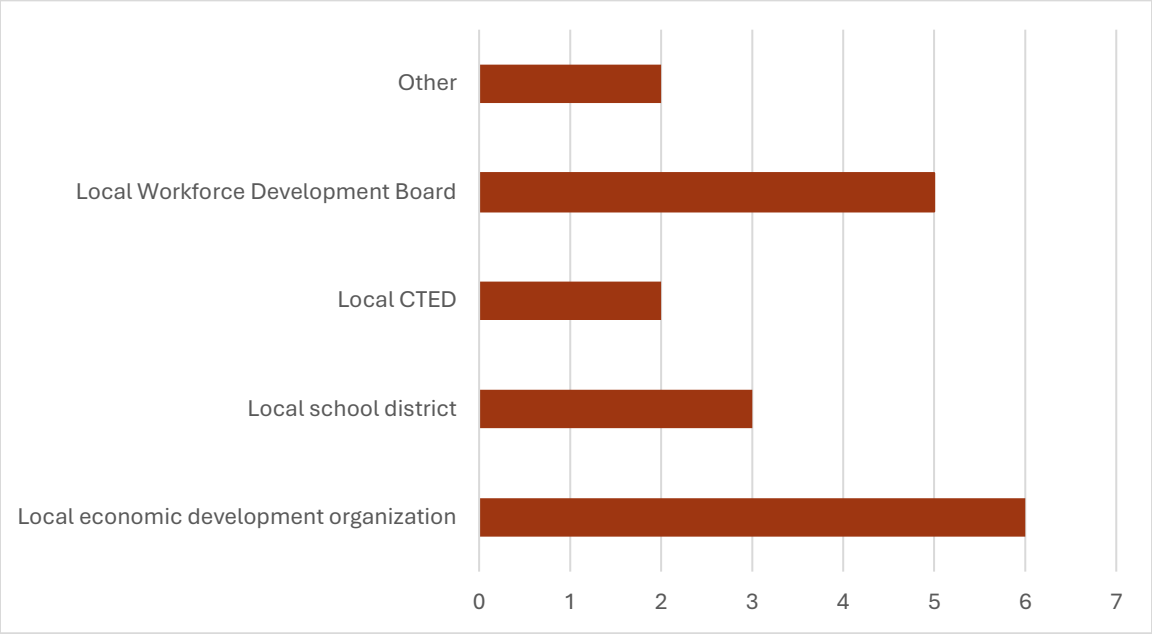
Question Number Four:

Which partnerships would you like to expand or learn more about? This question had four options: economic development, CTE programs, Community College, and workforce. Most participants selected Workforce (39%). Community College received 22%, Economic Development and CTE Programs both received 17%. One attendee selected "Other." This is consistent with the other regions, as CTE and adult education programs feed directly into the workforce. This also indicates that CTE and community college administrators are interested in better understanding how programs can develop graduates that will fill current and future workforce needs.



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 favored local economic development organizations to lead these conversations moving forward, followed closely by the local Workforce Development Board. The local school district and CTED were also selected as best options to lead future conversations. Local elected officials and Chamber of Commerce were identified the least favorable options. (See the graph below.)



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. Partnerships offering construction related apprenticeships, internships or training were identified most often (44%). One comment expressed that education institutions do not encourage businesses to participate in partnerships. Other comments and current partnership methods are listed below.

SkillzUp through Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce	CTE and WBL at CAVIAT	National work-based alliance virtual internships	General alignment of community college curriculum with expressed employer requests	Registered apprenticeships through Coconino Community College

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 a 5-point scale (1 = no value, 5 = most valuable).

The average rating was 4.22, indicating that the meeting was valuable for participants. Six participants (67%) selected 5, with only one selection for each 4, 3 and 1. No respondents selected 2.

Question Number Eight:

Please explain your answer to number 7. To better understand the ratings given in question 7, respondents were given an opportunity to explain their rating. All nine respondents offered clear feedback. Participants appreciated the time to connect, build new relationships, and strengthen existing relationships. Three responses expressed that the meeting was informational and rounded their understanding of workforce and economic needs and trajectories in the community. The meeting served the intended purpose of bridging connections between education and industry with one attendee stating, “this was the first time that Adult Education, college leadership, CTE leadership WDB members and local industry has been in the same room together.”

Conclusion

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. There are WBL and job training opportunities available throughout Coconino County, and this meeting created awareness and visibility. The good news is that business, economic development, and local workforce leaders show eagerness to work together to support the career development of students.