

# Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development Collaborative

Event 4 – Graham / Greenlee



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 discussion 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 – Graham and Greenlee Counties

On May 22, 2025, ADE held the fourth of 11 scheduled events in Graham / Greenlee Counties and sponsored by Eastern Arizona College.

Location:

Eastern Arizona College

615 n. Stadium Ave, Thatcher, AZ

Time: 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

90 people were invited to the meeting, 27 registered, and 30 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:

Gila Institute for Technology	Morenci High School	Mt Graham Hospital
Eastern Arizona College	Safford Library	Graham County Sheriff's Office
Arizona Science Center	Freeport-McMoRan	Mt Graham Regional Medical Center
City of Safford	Arizona@Work	Pima Unified District
Arizona Department of Education	Open Loop Energy	

## Feedback from the Meeting

To encourage opportunities for improvement, ADE presented four questions. These questions will be the same at each of the 11 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 activity is internal apprenticeship programs. An internal apprenticeship program is a structured training initiative within a company that helps current and new employees develop skills needed for specific roles. This type of program is identified mostly from the mining industry and was a deeper dive to understand how the program is organized and managed by companies to 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 in addition to the recognized programs. The region is unique 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 / Unpaid Internships - 7

Internal Apprenticeship Programs – 8

Registered Apprenticeship – 1

Summer Camp – 2

Temporary work at site – 1

Training Classes – 6

Job Shadowing – 1

Non-Clinical OJT – 1

Work Study – 1

OJT - 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

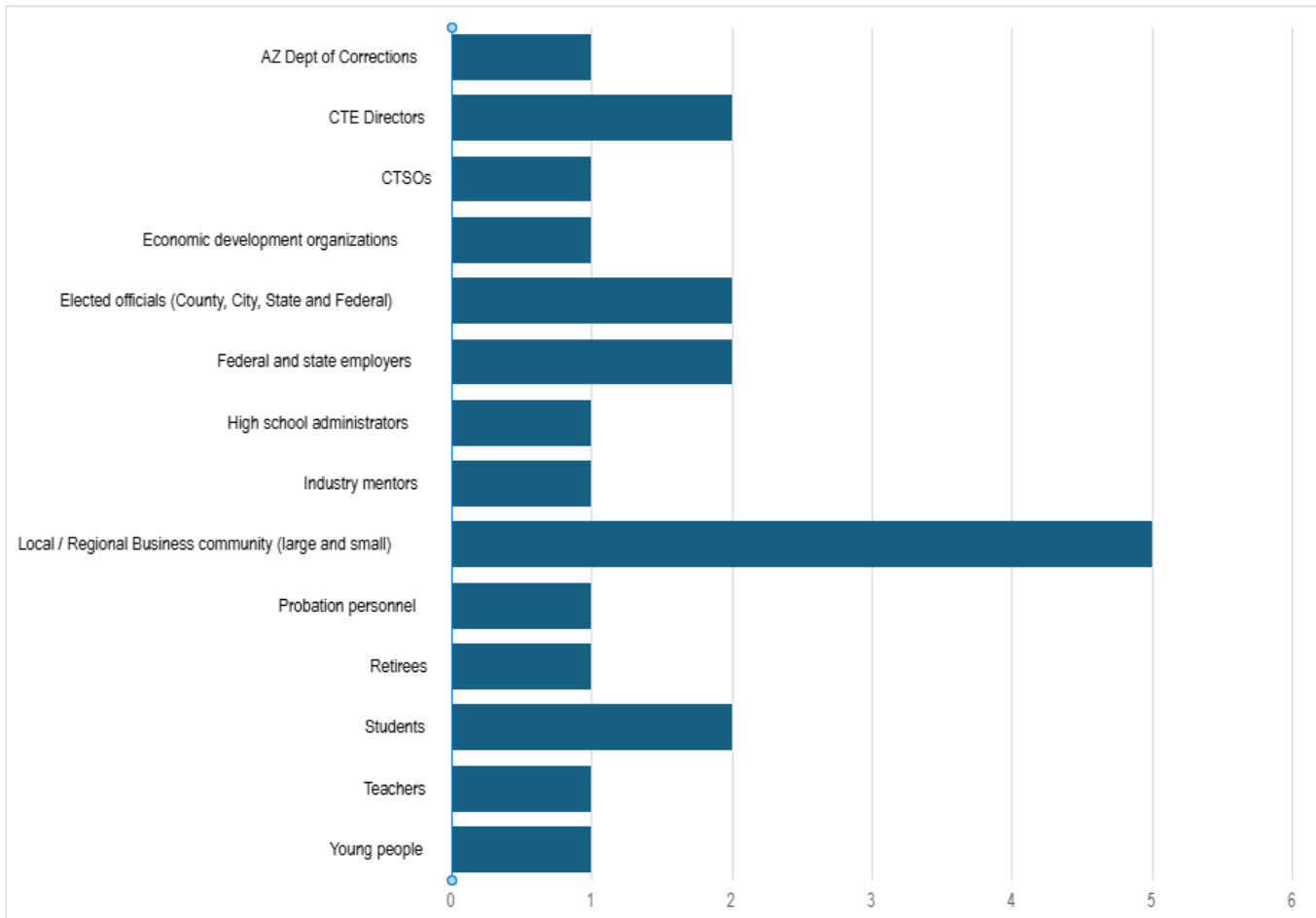
**Industry / School Connection** refers to program alignment between the CTE and/or adult education programs, community college, and industry/employers. The comments reflect the attendee's perceptions and experiences with CTE programs or CTE students or community colleges. **Program** gaps are perceived 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)



### 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 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 local / regional businesses. Others include CTE Directors, Elected Officials, government employers, and students. The table below displays the responses.



### Question Number Four:

“What are the next steps?” 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:

- Continue engagement

- Include a bigger community population - consider off hours for meetings, add parent / child panels in the discussion
- Map of what is happening (DYNAMIC), so many organizations and people doing things and 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 30 people who attended the event, 8 (30%) responded to the survey. It is common that survey participation can range from 25-30%, 43% is a positive indicator.

### Question Number One:

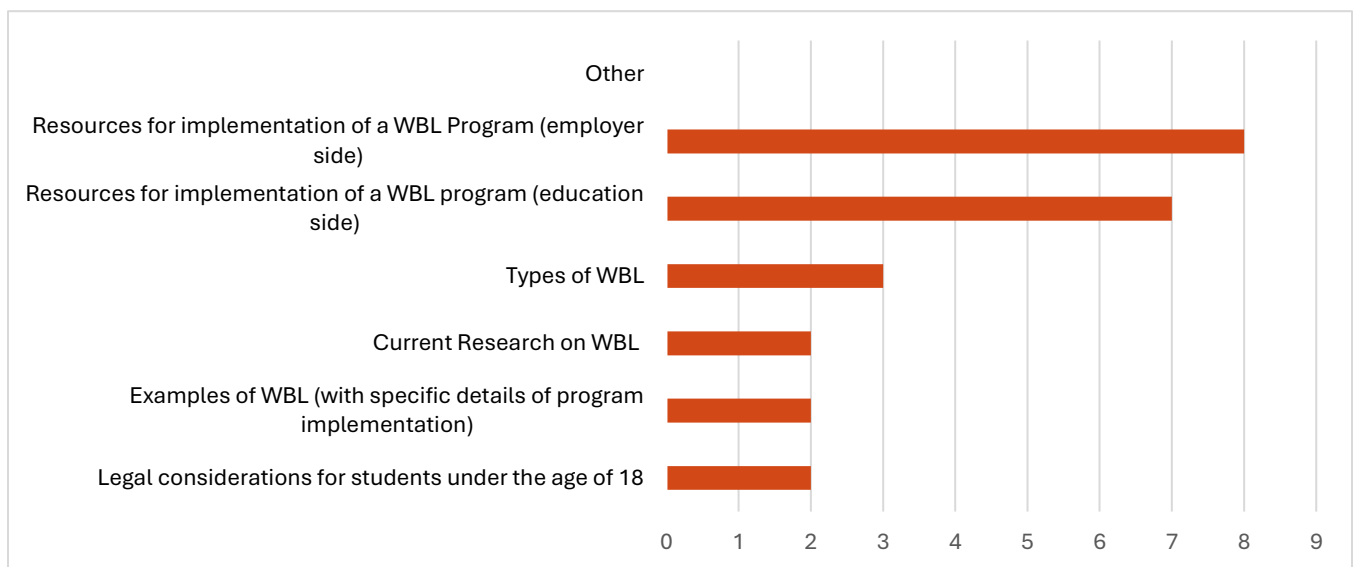
Based on what you have learned, how likely are you going to start (or change) a work-based learning opportunity?

The results were based on a 1-to-5 criteria, with one representing least likely and five representing most likely. The average rating of 4.25 (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

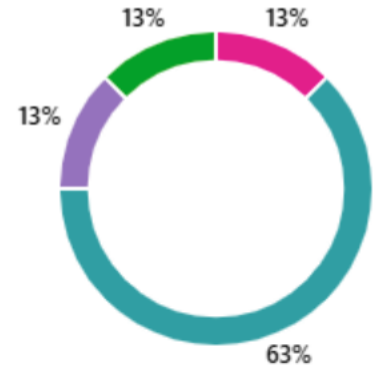
findings indicate a clear need for more accessible information on resources to support the implementation of Work-Based Learning (WBL) programs, from both employer and educator perspectives. A common challenge is the lack of clear communication regarding program funding and financial support for participating 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 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 (63%) said “to provide an economic opportunity for your community.” This indicates the local investment perspective on how the participants value CTE programs. (See the graph below.)

● Fill staffing needs	0
● Enhance student understanding of your industry	1
● Provide an economic opportunity for your community	5
● To grow your organization	1
● Other	1

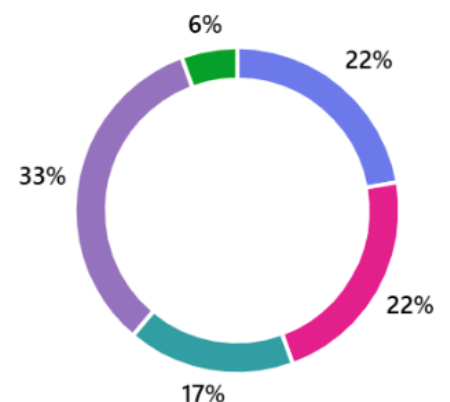


There was one comment made under “Other,” that stated “as a career advisor I work with CTE to enhance business partnerships.”

### 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 of the participants selected Workforce (33%), second was economic development (22%), and CTE programs (22%). This is consistent with the other regions as workforce, economic development, and CTE Programs are woven into the very fabric of workforce development. This also states that administrators and community partners would like more frequent information on local businesses and business staffing needs.

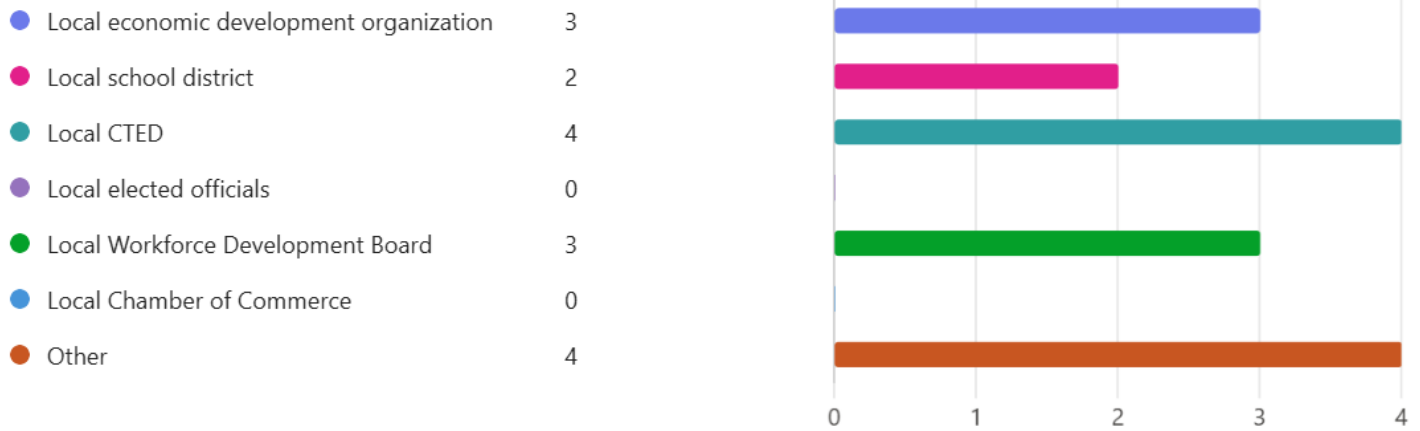
● Economic Development	4
● CTE Programs	4
● Community College	3
● Workforce	6
● Other	1



One attendee selected “Other” and wrote in apprenticeship programs.

**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 the local CTED as the top choice, followed closely by local economic development organizations and local workforce development boards. While the local school district were identified the least likely option. (See the graph below.)



This question also had an “other” option, this choice allowed the respondents to submit a comment to explain their answer. Many of these responses indicated that industry experts and college professors should lead these conversations.

**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.

GIFT-EAC-FMI Open Loop	Career Services Is Working with Local Employers to Build Internship Programs	Training Sessions for Employees to Prepare for Certification.	Career Service Center Provides Workforce Opportunities	AZ @ Work Provides WIOA Services
ASC's Work with Teachers, Schools, and Community Groups	Occasional Internships, Informal and Sought Out by Individual Instructors, and Counselors.	Career Services Meets with Local Partners to Build Mentoring and Internship Programs		

**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 1-to-5 scale, with one being not valuable and 5 being most valuable.

A few of the comments collected included: “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.”

38% of the respondents selected 5, and indicated the meeting was very valuable. The lowest response was from one attendee who rated the event as 3. The total rating was 4.25 out of 5 (90%).

**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.