

Regional Ecosystem for Workforce Development  
Collaborative

Event 10 – Pinal



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 – Gila County

On February 25, 2026, ADE held the 10<sup>th</sup> of 11 scheduled statewide events in Pinal County and sponsored by Central Arizona College – Signal Peak Campus.

Location:

8470 N. Overfield Rd.

Coolidge, AZ 85128

Time:

11:00 AM – 2:00 PM

187 people were invited to the meeting; 52 registered, and 40 people attended. The event was arranged to encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue and create an environment for innovative ideas and partnerships. The attendance make up was 9 individuals from business and industry, 7 from higher education or adult education, 10 from workforce development, 3 from economic development, 4 from CTE schools and 7 from ADE. Attendees were from the following organizations:

Pinal County School Office	Pinal County	City of Casa Grande
Hunter Contracting Co.	Queen Creek Adult Education Program	AZ Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)
Ivanhoe Electric	Western States Regional Carpenters Union	
Lucid Motors	ARIZONA@ WORK	
Jobs for Arizona Graduates (JAG)	Pinal County Education Services	
Central Arizona College	Abbott Nutrition	
HDS Truck Driving Institute	East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT)	
Casa Grande UHSD	AZ Department of Education (ADE)	
Maricopa USD	AZ Department of Economic Security (DES)	

### Feedback from the Meeting

To encourage opportunities for improvement, ADE presented four questions that were discussed among participants at their tables. 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. Thirty unique opportunities are identified with some being identified multiple times. The most mentioned activity is Abbott Nutrition internships with 5 tables listing this opportunity. Sundt Construction, Lucid Motors, Pinal County and Central Arizona College are identified by 3 tables as having WBL and Apprenticeship opportunities.

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 counts as provided by the participants.

BASF – 1

Wilson Electric – 1

Sundt Construction pre-apprenticeships – 3

Abbott Nutrition internships – 5

WIOA – 1

Lucid Motors Drive 48 – 3

Resolution Copper – 1

Pinal County programs – 3

Central Arizona College programs – 3

AZ Tech Council apprenticeships – 1

Heavy equipment operators – 1

Carpenters' Union apprenticeships – 1

Cosmetology & barber apprenticeships – 1

NCEER & Career Connections – 1

Sierra Orthodontics – 1

Frito Lay – 1

Hexcel – 1

Daisy – 1

Tractor Supply Co. – 1

HVAC apprenticeships – 2

Casa Grande UHSD – 2

SARCO Mining – 1

Garnet Motors – 1

CAVIT – 1

Core Ready Mix – 1

Vocational rehab – 1

EVIT – 1

Biotech – 1

General Contractors Association – 2

WEX – 1

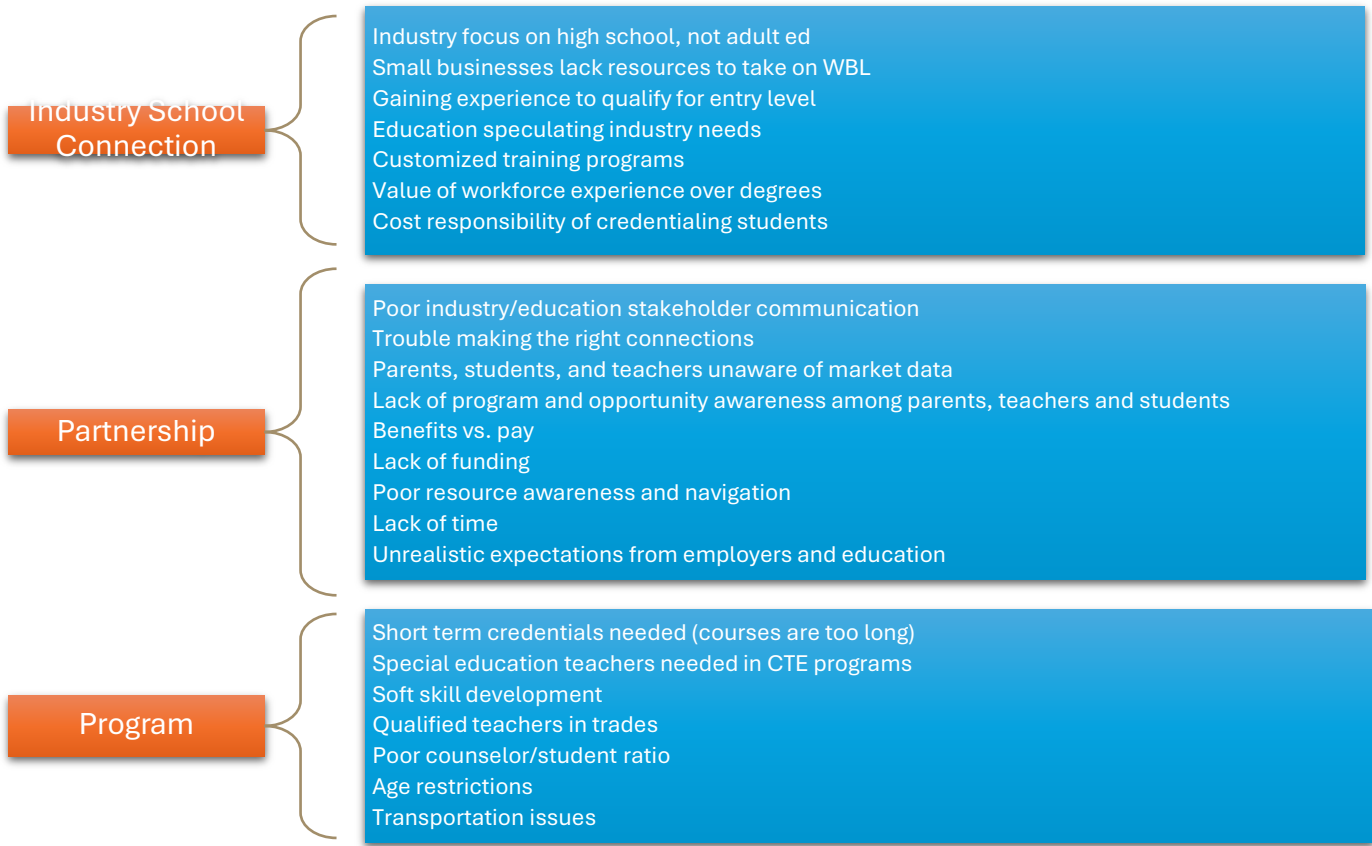
**Question Number Two:**

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

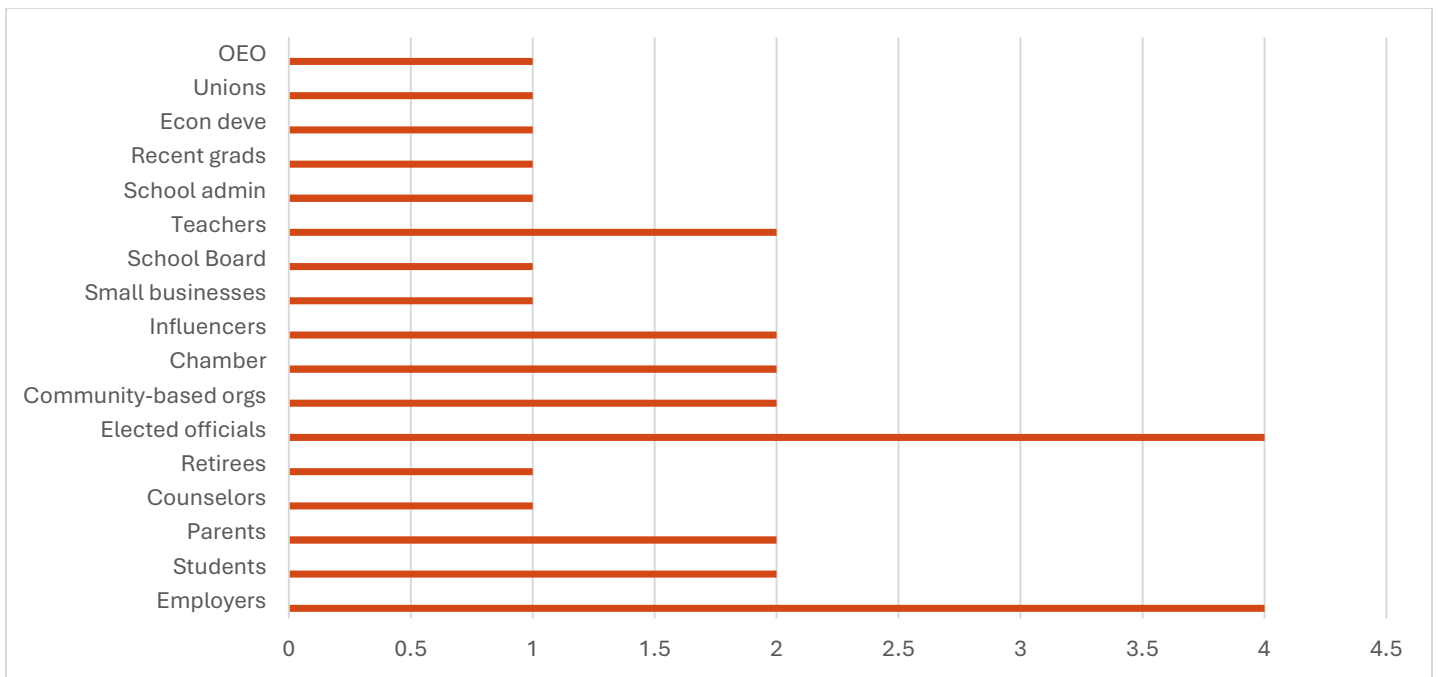
**Industry / School Connection** refers to program alignment between the CTE and/or adult education programs, community college, and industry/employers. The comments reflect the attendee's perceptions and experiences with CTE programs or CTE students or community colleges. **Program Gaps** are perceived 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. Participants expressed a lack of collaboration between education and industry and that there is room for improvement in the education system and its workforce development efforts. See the 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 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 employers and elected officials. Additional comments regarding elected officials included a need for policy and funding influence. Others identified as needing to be included in the conversation were students, parents, community-based organizations, chambers of commerce, social influencers, and teachers. Apart from social influencers, these responses are consistent with responses collected in other regions. The table below displays all 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. Many responses share a theme of increasing collaborative efforts between industry and education stakeholders. Below are the comments provided:

- Communicate with industry
- Align teacher training with industry standards and needs
- Share information with attendees of business and education summits
- Encourage superintendents and school boards to invite presentations
- Develop industry competencies continuum
- Identify crossover training opportunities
- Develop career marketing strategies
- Continue conversations
- Inventory needs, availabilities, and gaps to build next steps
- Expand Lucid Motors Drive 48 with Central Arizona College
- Develop English classes
- Create “day in the life” CTE career development trainings for teachers and administrators
- Get valuable information into the homes
- Network
- Create focus groups with targeted goals

- Share information with AZ Workforce Council

## **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 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 40 people who attended the event, 14 (35%) responded to the survey. It is common that survey participation ranges from 25-40% - 35% is an expected response rate to the survey.

### **Question Number One:**

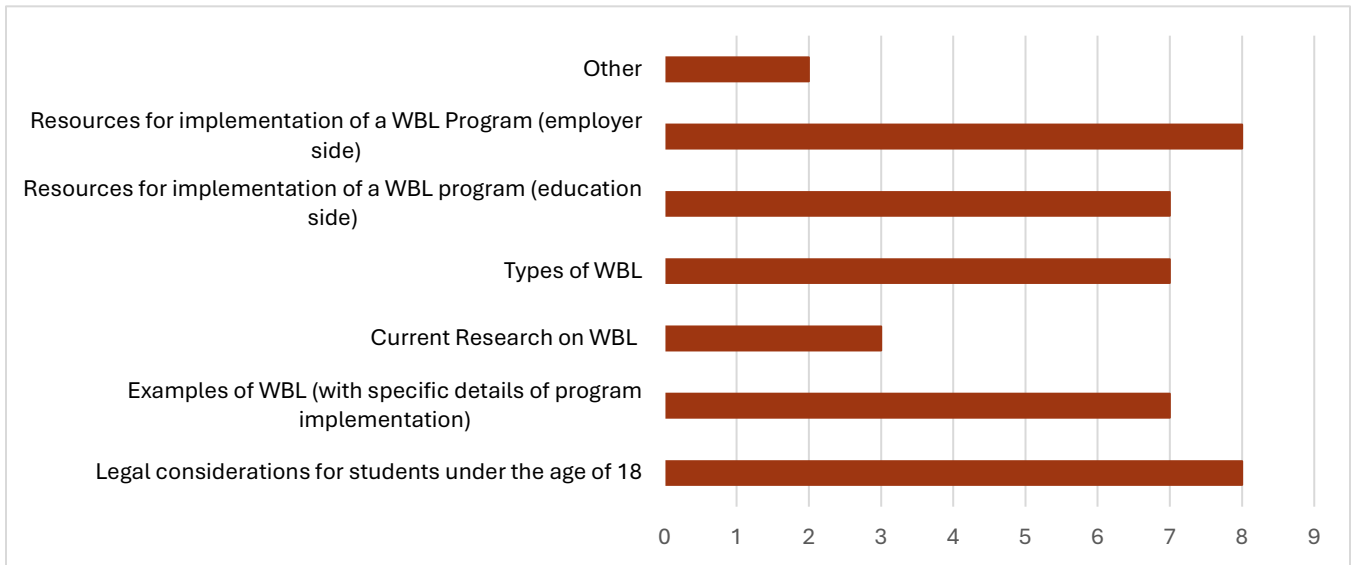
Based on what you have learned, how likely are you going to start (or change) a work-based learning opportunity?

The results were based on a 1-to-5 criteria, with one representing least likely and five representing most likely. The average rating of 4.43 (89%) indicates that most participants either plan to begin or continue engaging in work-based learning (WBL) programs or opportunities. 57% of respondents selected “5” indicating that there is a high interest and motivation to begin or adapt WBL opportunities in Pinal County. 43% of respondents selected either “4” or “3,” with no respondents selecting “2” or “1.” This is evidence that participants of the ecosystem are open to improving WBL opportunities in their area.

### **Question Number Two:**

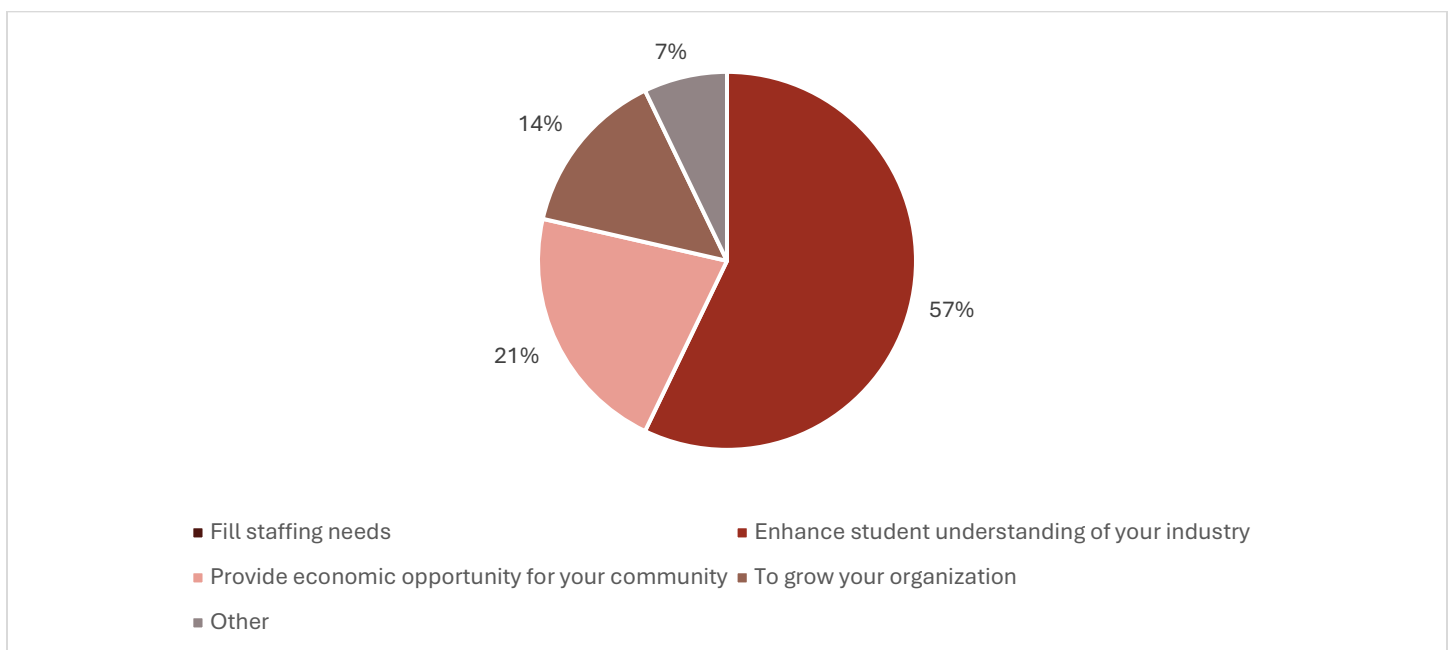
What do you need to know more about to participate in a successful WBL program (select up to three)? Legal considerations for students under the age of 18 and employer need for resources to implement WBL programs received the most responses with eight respondents selecting these options. Examples of WBL, types of WBL and

education resources for implementation were each selected by seven participants. This indicates that there is a need for more information about what WBL is and what considerations need to be considered while developing WBL programs. Similarly to other regions in Arizona, resources for implementation continue to be a demand.



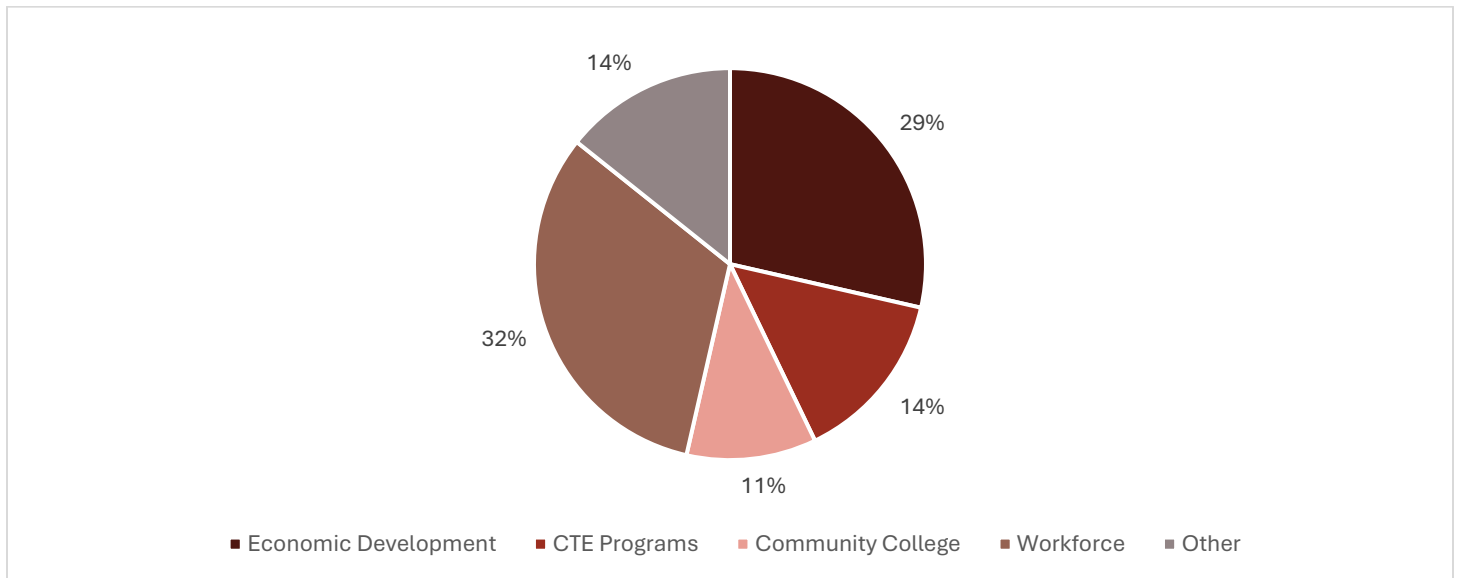
**Question Number Three:**

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 (57%) said to “enhance student understanding of your industry.” Responses to this question demonstrate that there is industry interest in providing exposure to CTE students.



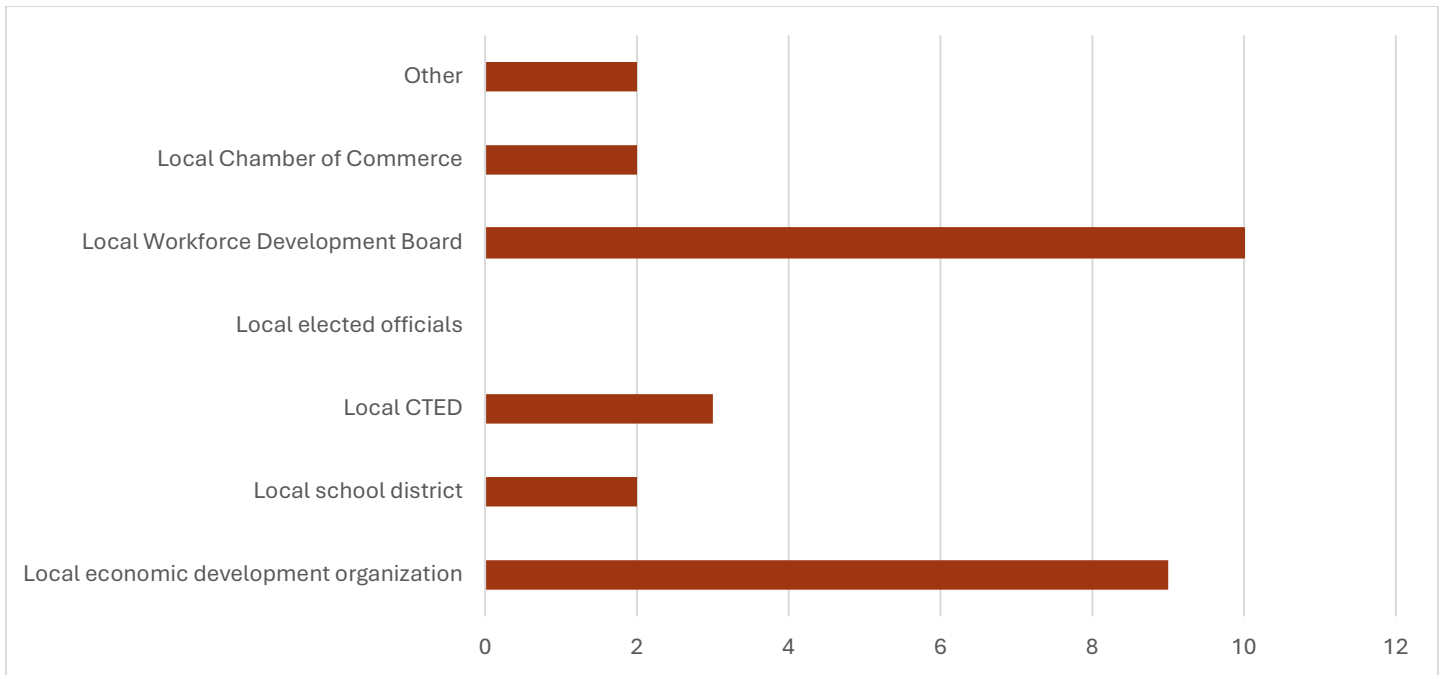
#### Question Number Four:

Which partnerships would you like to expand or learn more about? This question had four response options: Economic Development, CTE programs, Community College, and Workforce, and respondents could make more than one selection. Nine respondents would like to expand partnerships and learn more about the Workforce. Eight respondents selected Economic Development as an area they would like to expand partnerships and learn more. This is consistent with the other regions, as CTE and adult education programs feed directly into the workforce and economic development of a region.



#### 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 Workforce Development Board to lead these conversations moving forward, followed closely by the local economic development organizations. Local elected officials are identified as the least favorable to lead these conversations moving forward (see the graph below). This is consistent with the responses to question four, as participants are interested in learning more about economic and workforce development, and view those organizations as the best to lead the conversation moving forward.



**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. Comments and current partnership methods are listed below.

Industrial trade registered apprenticeships at EVIT	Pinal County offers WBL opportunities	JAG is heavily immersed in industry-education-workforce partnerships	Lucid Motors Drive 48 with Central AZ College	Partnership with Nissan Proving Grounds in development
Several local businesses serving on advisory council	Abbott Nutrition internships	Salt River Project	Honeywell	Higher education institutions

**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 criteria, with one representing least valuable and five representing most valuable).

The average rating was 4.64, indicating that the meeting was valuable for participants. Nine participants (64%) selected five, with the remaining 36% selecting four. There were no selections of one, two or three. Participants do view the event as a valuable expenditure of their time.

**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. Twelve of the 14 survey participants offered feedback for this prompt. The common theme was that participants appreciated the time to network and bridge some of the communication disconnects within the community ecosystem. The meeting served the intended purpose of building connections and opening conversations between education and industry. One attendee stated, “discussions showed different perspectives and viewpoints of stakeholders. Everyone expressed both challenges and solutions for moving these initiatives forward.”

**Conclusion**

Local schools and businesses have a shared interest and a shared responsibility to the community they serve. Both entities are affected by the outcomes of schooling, which provide students with learning experiences that support their ability to make a measurable contribution to, and receive meaningful benefits from the society they will lead in the future. There are WBL and job training opportunities available throughout Pinal County, and this meeting created an opportunity for all parties to brainstorm best ways to expand and better align industry needs and education efforts. The good news is that business, economic development, and local workforce leaders show eagerness to work together to support the career development of students via CTE education.