

The BILT: Giving Employers a Stronger Voice in Shaping College Programs

The role of employers in conventional advisory committees is often to “rubber stamp” what programs are already doing or plan to do, rather than to help shape the direction and content of those programs. The Business and Industry Leadership Teams (BILT) model, developed by the National Convergence Technology Center at Collin College, takes a different approach that puts businesses in a co-leadership role for college technical programs. The frequency, specificity, and depth of business input, coupled with an industry-led governance structure, sets the BILT model apart. BILTs embrace the notion that employer engagement is not an event, but a process built on trusted relationships between colleges and companies. BILTs leverage the sector knowledge of employers and teaching expertise of faculty to foster powerful collaborations that ensure program curriculum meets the needs of business and students are workforce ready. Using a structured, repeatable voting process, BILT members—subject matter experts (SME) in their fields—prioritize the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) that program graduates should possess, ultimately producing candidates the businesses are much more likely to hire. BILTs annually update the KSAs for their programs.

The BILT model does not diminish the college faculty’s “ownership” of any program. Rather, it provides a structure for leveraging the expertise of individuals who are active in the field the program is intended to serve. BILTs are designed to keep a close eye on trends and on how colleges can prepare students to be ready for future developments. By positioning employers as co-leaders and agenda developers, the BILT model provides demonstrable industry leadership and drives a higher level of accountability. It allows for an increase in formal and informal communication with college personnel, thus facilitating timely revision of curriculum in response to industry need.



Results of the BILT Approach

In a recent [study](#), employers and college personnel involved in partnerships based on the BILT model expressed more enthusiasm for their collaboration and enjoyed stronger results in areas such as curriculum development, student enrollment and satisfaction, and program marketing. Participation in such teams reportedly took more time and effort than conventional advisory committees but the benefits (both short- and long-term) made the effort worthwhile. The BILT Academy, an initiative of the NSF ATE *Pathways to Innovation* project (www.pathwaystoinnovation.org), offers guidance on getting started with the model; selecting BILT members and leaders; prioritizing knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA); and ongoing administration of programs that employ the BILT model. To ask questions, email BILT@cord.org