

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF YOUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

BUILDING AND CONDUCTING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS SURVEY

OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

Business leaders are an important partner in the community and should be actively engaged when working to ensure that youth are ready for college, work and life. Business leaders are eager to collaborate with community-based organizations and educational institutions to ensure that the young people in the community have the supports they need to succeed and be prepared for work. Preparing youth for work speaks directly to business' bottom line and the need for a prepared workforce. Business leaders also collaborate with community organizations because they feel it is their corporate social responsibility to be involved.

While many businesses are already engaged in partnerships with community organizations for various reasons, not all businesses are involved in a strategic and meaningful way. Therefore, it is in community leaders' best interest to build a clear picture of the landscape in which they would like to partner with business. In order to build that landscape, they need to understand:

- General types of partnerships business leaders lead within the community;
- Types of support local businesses provide within and outside of their company;
- The skills business leaders recognize that their workers need in order to succeed; and
- Business' corporate philanthropic guidelines, restrictions and practices.

The purpose of this document is to provide potential questions and tips for surveying business to help community leaders be better prepared and more targeted when engaging business in their work and help to inform their broad community-wide goals for youth and families. The following suggested survey questions are for local contacts in small, medium and large businesses on issues specifically relating to youth readiness for work, workforce development, corporate philanthropy and private and public partnerships. These questions are preceded by instructions, rationale and commentary to aid in starting a business survey.

BACKGROUND

Corporate Voices for Working Families (Corporate Voices) is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. Corporate Voices knows the importance of listening to the business voice on a variety of issues ranging from workplace flexibility to low wage workers to workforce readiness. Corporate Voices, along with other national partners, regularly surveys business and translates those survey findings into cutting-edge research and reports in areas spotlighting the intersecting interests of business, community and families.

New Business Survey Findings

Corporate Voices recently surveyed business leaders nationally to gain a better understanding of business leaders' current level of engagement in the community and interest in supporting the work readiness of future employees. The findings were compiled in the brief, *What Are Business Leaders Saying About Workforce Readiness?*

www.corporatevoices.org

Corporate Voices, as part of the Ready by 21 National Partnership, reviewed key findings and questions from recent business surveys and created this document for local community leaders who are interested in surveying local business leaders.

The questions provided here will help community leaders think outside the box when looking to survey their local business leaders. But, please note that these recommended questions should not be used in their entirety, but rather tailored to achieve a specific community's goal for the survey.

Ready by 21 and National Partnership

Ready by 21 is a set of innovative strategies that helps communities improve the odds that all youth will be ready for college, work and life. Ready by 21 is fueled and delivered by an unprecedented coalition of organizations representing government, education, nonprofit, business, research and philanthropy. Led by the Forum for Youth Investment, the Ready by 21 National Partnership reaches over 650,000 state and local leaders who impact the lives of more than 100 million children and youth.

www.readyby21.org

QUICK TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS SURVEY

Here are some quick tips for a strong and successful business survey:

- Ensure the survey is web-based, quick and easily accessible.
- Provide the brief purpose for the survey, how the results will be utilized, and where and when the results will be released. Consider keeping the responses anonymous.
- Reach out to business coalitions and other membership organizations to announce the survey in weekly newsletters.
- Coordinate with other business surveys that are already taking place in the community.
- Give business leaders at least a month to respond to the survey. Be sure to send the survey multiple times in order to capture the attention of business leaders. Do not forget to note the completion due date for the survey.
- Be sure to make most of your questions optional, in case the business representative is not comfortable with sharing the information requested.
- Provide other incentives, such as a prize for survey respondents.
- Select a limited number of questions from those suggested here to yield the most relevant information for your community.



SUGGESTED SURVEY QUESTIONS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

NOTE: *In order to collect general background information from businesses that are surveyed, the suggested questions below should be included. Collecting contact information is always important, but being able to sort and analyze data based on industry sector and the size of the company is critical. Please consider asking for additional identifying information: Company Address; City; State; Zip Code; Email; Office Phone; and Years with Company.*

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Industry Sector:

- Construction
- Education
- Financial Services
- Food Service
- Government
- Healthcare
- Hospitality
- Manufacturing
- Professional Services/Consulting
- Other / Non-Profit
- Retail

Size (Employees):

- 1 - 25
- 25 - 50
- 50 - 100
- 100 - 250
- 250 - 500
- 500 - 1,000
- 1,000 - 2,500
- 2,500 - 5,000
- 5,000 - 10,000
- 10,000 - 25,000
- 25,000 or more

Type of Company (Please check one from each column.):

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local | <input type="checkbox"/> Affiliation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regional | <input type="checkbox"/> Franchise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Branch |

ASSESS THE COMPANY'S LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING OF WORKFORCE READINESS AND ITS PRIORITY LEVEL

NOTE: The purpose of the following suggested questions is to gauge whether or not the business leaders in the community feel that workforce readiness is a critical business imperative and to determine their level of interest in investing in community partnerships. For the purpose of these questions workforce readiness is defined as possessing the skills employers believe are necessary to function effectively in the workforce and that new entrants should possess when hired.¹

Nationally, we know that a third of employers report that young people do not have the skills they need to be prepared for work,² and 53% report having a challenging time recruiting employees with the skills and education their companies need³.

Thinking about your new hires (youth ages 16-24), how many entry-level workers have the skills they need to be prepared for work?

- Less than a quarter
- About half
- About three quarters
- Almost all
- None

Thinking about your pool of applications, how many applicants have the skills they need to be prepared for work?

- Less than a quarter
- About half
- About three quarters
- Almost all
- None

Thinking about your community, how many youth have the skills they need to be prepared for work?

- Less than a quarter
- About half
- About three quarters
- Almost all
- None

Workforce readiness is a broad measure of entry level employees possession of skills they need to to the job. My organization considers workforce readiness a critical business imperative. (Please circle)

- 1 2 3 4 5
- Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Strongly Agree

Why or Why Not (max 200 words)?

My company comprehends and utilizes the term “workforce readiness.” (Please circle.)

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Somewhat Agree Strongly Agree

If your company does not use the term “workforce readiness,” what do you use as an alternative, i.e. job training, workforce development, or remedial training (max 150 words)?

What area of your company is responsible for leading your workforce readiness work? (Please note this question will be easier to answer for large and medium sized businesses.)

- Corporate Contributions
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Diversity
- Human Resources
- Line / Operations
- Public/Community Relations
- Training Development
- Other (Please list: _____)

LEARN ABOUT THE COMPANY’S WORKFORCE READINESS PRACTICES

NOTE: Knowing the types of entry-level workers businesses hire and the challenges businesses faces with these individuals will allow you to understand which leaders in the community are struggling with the preparedness of their workforce. These business leaders may be more willing to engage in the community’s workforce readiness and education efforts. These questions are focused on entry-level employees, defined as workers hired directly from high school, with or without a degree, or college. Please note larger businesses hire employees from all levels, including management, to their workforce. These questions provide insight on how the business leaders are already engaged in the community to prepare their future workforce.

What is your typical new entrants’ education level?

- % Fewer than 12 Years of School
- % High School Diploma/GED
- % Technical Certification
- % Associate’s Degree
- % Bachelor’s Degree
- % Masters/PhD
- % Other

LEARN ABOUT THE COMPANY'S WORKFORCE READINESS PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

Please rank the following challenges of integrating entry-level workers within your organization (1 being the most challenging and 6 being the least challenging):

- Basic Skills (reading, writing and math)
- Professionalism
- Communication (written and oral)
- Creativity Skills
- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Teamwork/Collaboration

Considering the challenge you ranked number 1 (most challenging) above, what programs/ supports are currently in place within your organization to address this issue related to entry level workers (check all that apply)?

- Increased screening practices for entry level workers
- Internal workforce readiness training (basic skills training)
- Career development training
- Strategic community partnerships (with community colleges, high schools, technical schools, etc.)
- Other (Please define: _____)

What programs/supports for new employees do you currently have in place? (Please check all that apply.)

- Apprenticeships
- Career Awareness
- Flexible scheduling to accommodate class schedule
- Internships
- Job Shadowing
- Mentoring
- Scholarship Assistance
- Skills Enhancement
- Tuition Reimbursement

Please share one or more best practices regarding your organization's workforce readiness training of recently hired employees (max 250 words).

Please share one or more lessons learned regarding your organization's workforce readiness training of recently hired employees (max 250 words).

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

NOTE: Identifying how and where businesses are already involved in the community is key to understanding their community engagement strategies and where/how they may be willing to partner. This information will help you make the case to business to invest along with the workforce development/education pipeline. Knowing what business leaders see as reasons and barriers for partnering with community-based organizations is important to any future successes. If you are using these survey questions to begin to bridge the gap and build better partnerships with business, it is always a good idea to understand who is responsible for community partnerships within the business.

Where along the cradle-to-career continuum do your investments and partnerships with in the community usually make the biggest impact? (Please mark all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Postsecondary Education Credentialing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preschool | <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifelong Learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle School | <input type="checkbox"/> Mature Workers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please List: _____) |

What types of community initiatives are you usually involved in? (Please mark all that apply.)

- Early Learning
- Afterschool Programs
- Youth Health and Well-Being
- Service Learning
- K-12 Education Reform/Improvement
- Drop-out Prevention
- Financial Literacy
- Mentoring
- Alternative Pathways for At-Risk Youth
- Post-Secondary Attainment
- Work-Based Internships/Apprenticeships
- Other (Please list: _____)

Please list the types of community organizations you already partner with.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local/Regional Government | <input type="checkbox"/> Faith-based |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community-Based Organization / Non Profits | <input type="checkbox"/> Other/Business |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foundations | <input type="checkbox"/> None |
| <input type="checkbox"/> K-12 Schools (public / charter / parochial) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education | |

Developing a Business Engagement Strategy?

Corporate Voices for Working Families, United Way Worldwide and Workforce Strategy Center released *Supporting the Education Pipeline: A Business Engagement Toolkit for Community-Based Organizations*, which assists community leaders in creating beneficial and sustainable partnerships with business by providing lessons on how to identify potential partners, to develop realistic goals and how to set up partnerships for long-term success. A companion website has been developed, which is a clearinghouse of tips, tools, resources and examples of techniques others in education and workforce fields have used to engage business.

www.corporatevoices.org/businessengagement

Where do you currently meet with local community and business partners?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chamber of Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Clubs(Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Associations | <input type="checkbox"/> Board Meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faith-based organizations | <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce Investment Board |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please explain: _____) | |

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (CONTINUED)

What roles do you usually play in community partnerships?

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Participant | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Champion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peer-to-Peer Promoter | <input type="checkbox"/> Donor | <input type="checkbox"/> Board Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planner | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers | <input type="checkbox"/> In-Kind Sponsor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Content Expert | <input type="checkbox"/> Trainer & Employer | |

What are the most useful contributions community partnerships can make to business?

- Aid in accomplishing broader corporate responsibility and philanthropic goals
- Improved recruiting and retention
- Increase opportunities to provide community leadership
- Gain access to other private and public leaders in the community
- Opportunity to showcase existing initiatives
- General support and recognition
- Better prepared existing and incoming workforce
- Improved employee engagement
- Ability to leverage strategic investments with other community and business partners
- Other (Please explain: _____)

Business Engagement Tools: Stakeholders Wheel and Menu

Not sure which business coalitions to engage and survey? Looking to engage business leaders in your community for the first time? Not sure what role business leaders can play in a partnership? Check out *Corporate Voices' Business Engagement Stakeholders Wheel* and *A Call to Action: Business Engagement Menu*.

www.corporatevoices.org

What do you consider the barriers to community partnerships?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to initiate and/or establish a relationship | <input type="checkbox"/> Competing interests |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time, funding and human resources constraints | <input type="checkbox"/> Geographic isolation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of data to show the impact of the partnership | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication/language barriers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of firm and measurable outcomes | <input type="checkbox"/> Incompatible missions/goals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please explain: _____) | |

Please share one or more best practices regarding your organization's ability to partner with community-based organizations (max 250 words).

Please share one or more lessons learned regarding your organization's ability to partner with community-based organizations (max 250 words).

What is your role in developing these community partnerships?

- I am not involved at all.
- I am consulted from time to time regarding entry level worker programs/supports.
- I am responsible.

Whose function within your organization is responsible for community partnerships?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/Community Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Contributions | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Social Responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please explain: _____) |

CORPORATE / FOUNDATION PHILANTHROPY

NOTE: Working to understand a local business' philanthropic practices and guidance for giving can be time consuming but can provide you with a good idea of a business' inclination toward giving and partnering. Before asking these questions, consider conducting your own research by visiting business' websites and scanning local newspapers for more of this information. Do not consider asking these philanthropic questions on their own - weave them in with some of the questions around community partners to increase the likelihood of getting them answered. Make all of these questions optional, as some businesses will be more comfortable with sharing this information than others.

Does your company engage in local philanthropy? (Please circle.) Yes/No

Does your company accept open requests for funding partnerships from community-based organizations? (Please circle.) Yes / No

What is an estimate of your annual philanthropic budget? \$ _____

If you have a company foundation, what is an estimate of your foundation's yearly giving? \$ _____

Briefly describe the primary purpose for your community funding (max 250 words).

Briefly describe some activities currently funded (max 250 words).

Does your company give money toward children and youth? (Please circle.) Yes/No

If yes, which one or two of the following areas best represent your primary goals for children and youth?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basic and applied education | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/emotional well-being |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical health | <input type="checkbox"/> Civic and community engagement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career awareness/vocational development | |

Do you differentiate your giving by populations? (Please circle.) Yes/No

If yes, which populations are primary targets of this funding, children and youth who are: (Select all that apply.)

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female Only | <input type="checkbox"/> Dropout | <input type="checkbox"/> In Foster Care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male only | <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless/Transient | <input type="checkbox"/> LGBTQ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children of Incarcerated Parents | <input type="checkbox"/> Immigrant / Migrant | <input type="checkbox"/> Low income |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Involved with Juvenile Justice | <input type="checkbox"/> Limited English Speaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical or Learning Disabled | <input type="checkbox"/> Teen Parents/Pregnant and Parenting Youth | |

Do you track the number of employee volunteer hours donated to the community annually? (Please circle.) Yes/No

If Yes, how many employee volunteers participated and how many hours did they donate? _____

Whose function within your organization is responsible for philanthropy work with community organizations?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/Community Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please explain: _____) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Contributions | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Social Responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Management | |

BUILDING AND EXECUTING A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS SURVEY: CASE STUDY OF THE GREATER CINCINNATI WORKFORCE NETWORK

The Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network (GCWN) is a regional partnership of philanthropy, government, employers, education and community organizations working together to help employers find and retain skilled employees, and to assist low-skilled, low-income residents further their education and obtain good jobs. In early 2010, GCWN realized that within the Greater Cincinnati area more than 100,000 workers were unemployed. At the same time, business leaders reported issues with finding qualified workers. So, GCWN decided to conduct a survey.

"We wanted to survey employers to understand their current workforce needs despite the constraints of the current economy. We also needed to gather data to validate the types of competencies employees needed to be successful at work" explained Ross Meyer, executive director of GCWN. "The goal was to utilize this information to communicate expected growth of employers in the area and the competencies community organizations needed to be training entry-level employees to get them back to work."

Knowing that it could not draft the survey alone, GCWN partnered with a local professor from Xavier University. The survey asked business leaders to report:

- Expected growth of their organization over the next 3-5 years;
- Those positions in which they saw the greatest turnover;
- Their most successful recruitment strategies;
- Their ability and success at hiring qualified workers;
- Their criteria for selecting an employee from an interview;
- Minimal level of education required for their positions; and
- The skills/competencies most lacking in their employees.

(Continued . . .)

(Note: Many of these types of questions, specifically around the skills/competencies most lacking in employees, can be found on pages 5 - 6.)

LOGISTICS

In order to ensure a higher response rate, GCWN made the process as simple as possible. They used Constant Contact and set up the survey online. Survey questions were tailored to be answered easily and quickly. GCWN estimated the survey took business leaders 10 minutes to complete. *(Note: Constant Contact is an online marketing company serving small businesses, nonprofit organizations and membership associates. For more information, please visit www.constantcontact.com.)*

The main challenge GCWN faced was advertising and publicizing the survey to business leaders. GCWN met with multiple business organizations to build relationships, explain the importance of the survey and ask them to send the survey to their members. They met with their local Workforce Investment Board, local chambers of commerce, two major human resource associations in the region and directly with employers to gain business leaders' attention.

Because GCWN conducted the majority of the work themselves, the cost for the survey process was minimal, under \$500. The only costs to GCWN were accrued when they asked local associations to distribute the survey because these associations charged a minimal fee to send information to their distribution lists.

THE RESULTS

In May and June 2010, GCWN successfully surveyed 122 small, medium and large employers from multiple geographic locations (Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana), representing various industry sectors.

With the results, GCWN produced "Workforce Trends in Greater Cincinnati Key Findings of the 2010 Employer Survey." This report included survey findings and recommendations for private and public sector leaders to work together to produce better-skilled employees. For instance, one recommendation called for "community partners to assess their programs and service delivery models to ensure that all of the Department of Labor's competencies are being addressed in job training and placement service programs." In the report, the results are broken down by topic area and compared across business size, industry sectors and other data factors.

The survey received a lot of attention in the local media and GCWN considers this a major part of their communication materials when talking publicly about workforce issues and the challenge employers are facing.

GCWN is looking to a private firm to conduct the survey on an annual basis and to assist in the advertising of the survey.

GCWN is led by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati with major support provided by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. For more information on GCWN and the 2010 Employer Survey, please visit: www.cincinnatiworkforce.org.



CONCLUSION

Business leaders can play vital roles in building broader partnerships and setting community goals for children, youth and families in the community. Understanding business' viewpoints and needs is the basis to any sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership. The survey questions provided in this document serve as a kicking-off point for a business survey. These questions should be tailored to your specific community and the purpose of the survey that you are conducting. Please remember to ask if they would like to be involved in your work and to provide your contact information, so, you are able to follow-up with them with the results of the survey and for further partnership opportunities. These survey results can be useful when presenting to business leaders, recruiting business leaders in your efforts and making decisions about your program and community. Please feel free to contact Corporate Voices' Ready by 21 Team for additional direct assistance when administering local surveys to business at readyby21@corporatevoices.org.

Corporate Voices should be acknowledged if these questions are used to develop a survey by a local community.

Please acknowledge appropriately:
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ABOUT CORPORATE VOICES
www.corporatevoices.org

Corporate Voices for Working Families is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we create and advance innovative policy solutions that reflect a commonality of interests among the private sector both global and domestic, government and other stakeholders.

We are a unique voice, and we provide leading and best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation's economy and enhancing the vitality of our communities.

Collectively our more than 50 partner companies, with annual net revenues of more than \$1 trillion, employ more than 4 million individuals throughout all 50 states.

ABOUT READY BY 21
www.readyby21.org

Ready by 21 is a set of innovative leadership capacity-building strategies developed by the Forum for Youth Investment. The national experts at the Forum have decades of youth policy experience which they leveraged to make the Ready by 21 strategies the most effective way to help communities improve the odds that all youth will be ready for college, work and life. The Ready by 21 strategies recognize that effective leadership is the critical lever to improving health, educational and social outcomes for children and youth. The Ready by 21 strategies are flexible enough to meet leaders where they are and helps focus them on goals and the systems needing to be addressed; challenges them to create a shared vision and agenda; helps leaders build broader partnerships, set bigger goals, use better data and implement bolder strategies, and asks how all stakeholders, including youth, can deliver solutions.

END NOTES

¹ American Society for Training and Development, The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families and The Society for Human Resource Management. *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided Workforce Readiness Training*. 2009.

² The Conference Board, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families and The Society for Human Resource Management. *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*. 2006.

³ Civic Enterprises and Corporate Voices for Working Families. *Across the Great Divide Perspectives of CEOs and College Presidents on America's Higher Education and Skills Gap*. 2011.

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