

AIR Sector Strategies Framework

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Sector strategies align local and regional workforce development and education entities to meet the collective needs of an in-demand industry. Integral to this is the development of a skilled talent pipeline for critical jobs, while ensuring equitable access to education and training, sustainable career pathways, quality jobs, and sustainable wages for workers and learners. Sector strategies support industry growth, healthy economies, and individual and community prosperity through the development of skilled workers.

Each sector strategy initiative is steeped in regional context, partnership ecosystems, and unique workforce challenges. It serves to respond to regional economic and labor market nuances. Within sector strategies, we emphasize:

Sector-based training programs align education and training curriculum to industry-defined skill needs to train workers and learners.

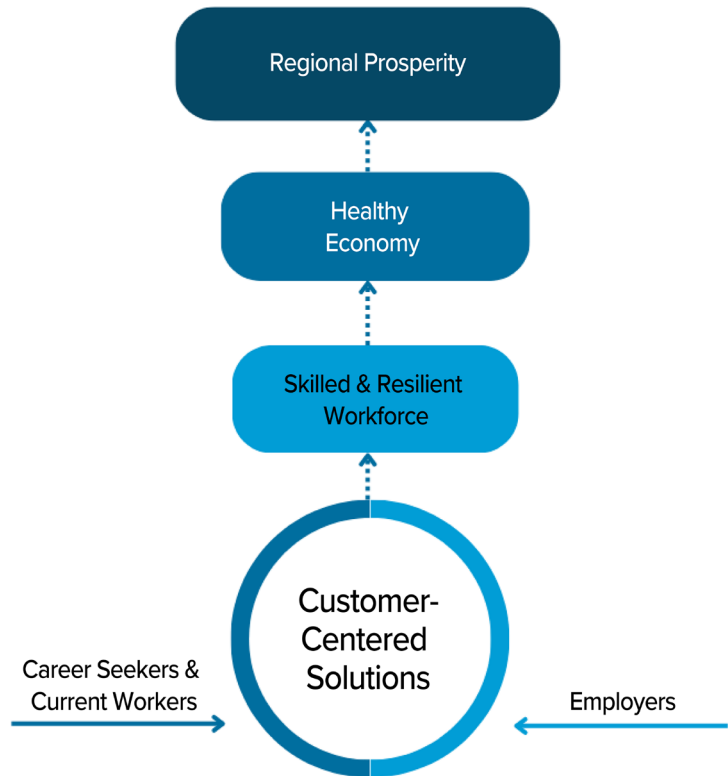
- **Sector partnerships:** A strategic, regional group consisting of employers within a critical industry sector and key partners in education, economic and workforce development, and community services. They are industry driven, promoting comprehensive public-private partnerships that bring responsiveness, adaptability, and sustainability to regional labor market needs and create opportunities for workers.
- **Career pathways and sector-based training programs:** Tools developed by sector partnership efforts. Career pathway systems develop education and training solutions with the leadership and engagement of key industry sector employers to ensure that training and education meet the skill and competency needs of industries and that career progression opportunities are clear to workers and learners.

AIR believes that establishing a framework for sector strategies provides an instrument to easily communicate the value, guiding principles, and elements/sub-elements to existing and potential adopters across the country. By including these elements, the framework becomes a powerful tool that can simultaneously persuade, educate, and illustrate implementation of sector strategies at the regional level.

Value

Investing in sector strategies benefits job seekers and industries alike, driving prosperity across communities and regions.

- **Regional prosperity is best achieved through a healthy economy**, which supports individuals as career seekers and employers. A healthy economy provides career opportunities and a tax base to support strong investments in education, healthcare, public safety, and other quality-of-life measures that represent thriving communities and individuals.
- **Healthy economies are fueled by a skilled workforce** that provides the talent and innovation that businesses need to expand; that expansion then drives the growth of career opportunities for workers.
- **Sector strategies are an industry-driven, public-private partnership tool** to support the growth of healthy economies through the development of skilled workers. They are based on strong engagement and direction from industries regarding current and future skills needs.
- **Sector strategies should be designed to achieve community development goals** that are based on the growth of industries, occupations, and skills that will lead to family-sustaining career opportunities for citizens. These combined ecosystem goals should be collaboratively defined by leaders across government, industry, economic development, community organizations, and workers.

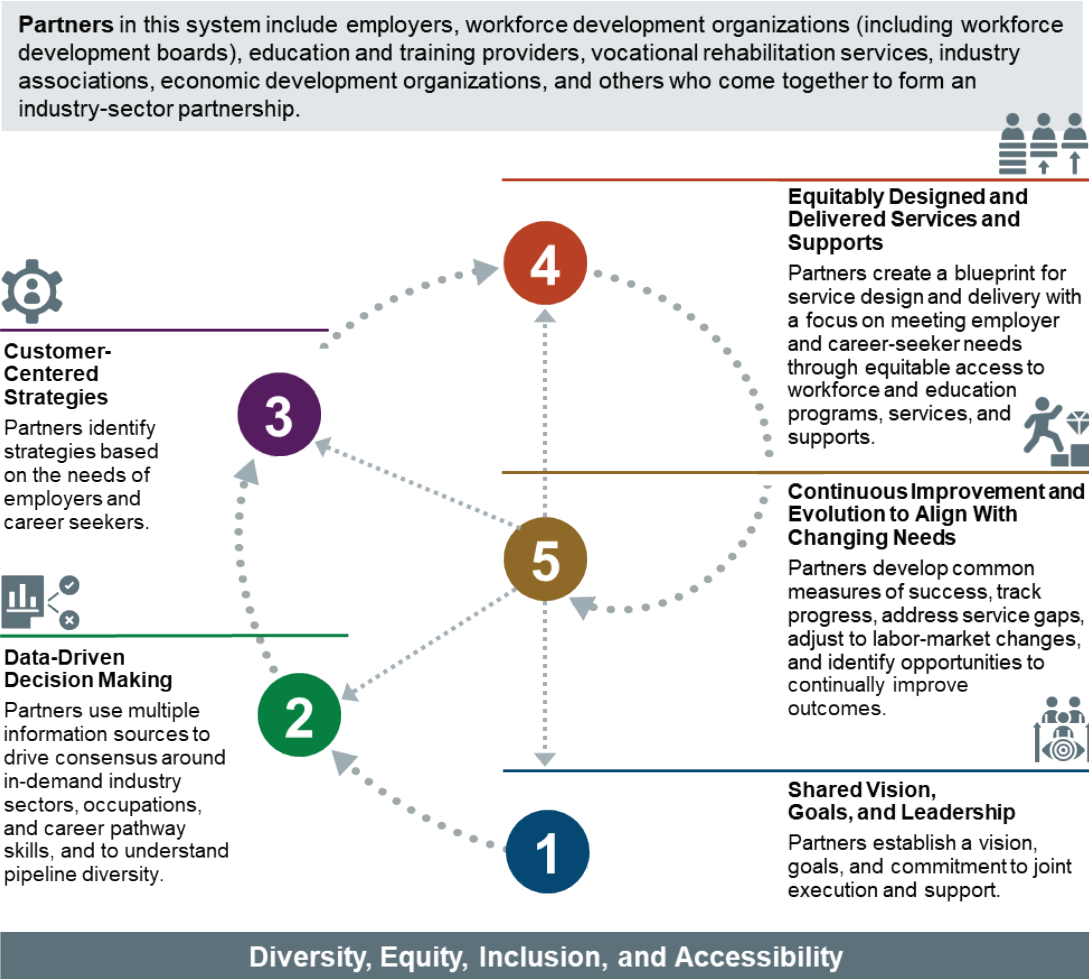


When sector strategy partners are aligned, they can develop talent on the scale necessary to attract, retain, and grow the businesses vital to supporting a healthy regional economy.

- **Sector strategies are investments across the ecosystem** to support the development of skills in key occupations within industries deemed by the partners to offer the best opportunities for economically thriving careers. Those investments are made through the design and delivery of services and support to help job seekers, students, and incumbent workers gain the skills necessary to meet the talent needs of the high-growth industries.
- **Sector strategies achieve deeper impact when they are undertaken across the ecosystem** and are based on that community’s shared goals for development and prosperity. While any single organization can take on a sector-based approach to its work, most partners do not have sufficient resources to achieve significant outcomes on their own.

Five Elements

AIR’s Sector Strategies Framework includes the five key elements depicted in the graphic below. The elements are underpinned by a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility as a foundation for setting vision, strategy, investment, and implementation.





Shared Vision, Goals, and Leadership: These are essential components that are always seen in successful sector strategies and often lacking in those that struggle. Establishing a common vision and goals across public and private partners is critical for partnership building; efforts to align programs, priorities, and resources across partners; and sustainability. This work across partners takes strong and committed leadership.



Data-Driven Decision Making: This element recognizes the value of integrating data with information derived from (1) evaluation, (2) statistics, (3) job seeker and employer experience, and (4) using data analytics. The qualitative and quantitative evidence obtained from integrated data informs decisions and serves as a consensus-building tool to drive partner decision making.



Customer-Centered Strategies: It is important to understand the needs of industry and career-seeking customers when designing solutions. While industry occupational and skill needs are key drivers for solution design, those solutions must be designed and delivered to meet the needs of career seekers and current workers. Without that intentional design, those customers will not be able to fully access or engage in sector-based education and training that creates the needed skilled workforce.



Equitably Designed and Delivered Services and Supports: While employer and career-seeker voices are crucial to design an organization's service and delivery strategies, this element stresses the importance of including input from historically marginalized populations in the design, delivery, and evaluation of that sector strategy system to ensure equitable access to workforce and education programs, services, and supports.



Continuous Improvement and Evolution to Align with Changing Needs: Identifiable outcome measures are needed to assess and manage performance over time. However, our framework recognizes that regional economies, labor markets, and industry and career seeker needs are dynamic, requiring continuous assessment of market changes and adjusting measures and solutions to ensure alignment.

Sub-elements

In the table that follows, AIR shares potential approaches that include each element to implement a sector strategy. Note that this is not a comprehensive list and that, while it is presented in a linear fashion here, a review of the elements at different junctures may be needed.

Element 1: Shared Vision, Goals, and Leadership

Partners establish a vision, goals, and commitment to joint execution and support.

Sub-elements

1a. Key regional leaders establish regional approaches to sector strategies.

- Know that a variety of organizations can successfully lead sector strategies. These can range from regional workforce development boards to economic development organizations.
- Plan carefully in advance which key partners and leaders are essential to involve.
- Plan to include an analysis of labor market data.
- Align your plans with regional goals for sector partnership efforts.

1b. Establish regional industry partnerships to lead sector-based strategies for critical industries.

- Assemble a diverse group of partners, including employers, workforce development organizations (e.g., workforce boards), education and training providers, industry associations, economic development organizations, and other entities responsible for designing and delivering talent solutions.
- Examine real-time data and identify sector and sub-sector priorities.
- Determine how to staff, launch, and support multiple priority industries through sector partnerships, if applicable.
- Validate initial assumptions with key industry leaders, employers, and/or associations to gauge interest, need, and relevance.
- Establish a leadership role for employer partners.

1c. Establish partner vision and values.

- Establish a vision for collaboration, action, and impact across industry employers, industry intermediary and labor organizations, and public sector and nonprofit partners.
- Ensure shared vision and associated values are designed to:
- Meet the individual and collective goals of participating employers and partners,
- Provide workers and learners with economically sustaining jobs and career growth opportunities, and
- Achieve community prosperity goals.

1d. Share definitions, goals, and responsibilities to achieve the vision.

- Build on collective vision and values, establish common definitions to ground strategy, and outline key goals and responsibilities for achieving intended outcomes.
- Determine (1) ground rules for engagement, (2) who takes the lead in identifying and prioritizing critical challenges and solutions, and (3) who implements them.
- Anticipate that goals and responsibilities may shift or grow in number in response to economic and industry labor market shifts, worker and learner needs, or changing community and partner dynamics.

Element 2: Data-Driven Decision Making

Partners use multiple information sources to drive consensus around in-demand industry sectors, occupations, and career pathway skills, and to understand pipeline diversity.

Sub-elements

2a. Use labor market information to determine in-demand sector priorities.

- Ensure partners come to agreement on primary sources of labor market information.
- Collectively analyze those data to identify in-demand industry sectors and to determine priorities and the geographic scope of sector strategy efforts.

2b. Use quantitative data and qualitative employer and service provider intelligence to identify *potential* critical occupations and demand-supply gaps.

- Ensure partners regularly provide labor market data that focuses on the industry's most prominent occupations, job functions, or pathways.
- Validate data with employers and additional business intelligence and/or primary data collected to define economically thriving jobs that are *most* critical to industry employers' operations.

Element 3. Customer-Centered Strategies

Partners identify strategies based on the needs of employers and career seekers.

Sub-elements

3a. Establish employer-centered practices to *understand* industry needs and to *design* relevant solutions.

- Establish streamlined processes for engaging employer customers across partners.
- Build upon data to identify and understand their talent needs.
- Collect their ongoing input on programming and services as they are designed and delivered.
- Identify shared measures of success, and track progress and outcomes through a process of continuous improvement.

3b. Establish customer-centered practices to *understand* the needs of learners, workers, and career seekers and to *design* relevant solutions.

- Gather and use the career-seeking customer voice to understand career seekers' needs.
- Design programming and services that drive customer access, ongoing participation, and outcomes.
- Include in analysis those learners currently in training programs, those seeking initial employment, and incumbent workers.

Element 4. Equitably Designed and Delivered Services and Supports

Partners create a blueprint for service design and delivery with a focus on meeting employer and career-seeker needs through equitable access to workforce and education programs, services, and supports.

Sub-elements

4a. Design a service delivery blueprint to streamline services to dual customers.

- Leverage collective vision and goals (Element 1) and input from employer and career seekers (Element 3) to design a blueprint, or program design, for relevant and equitable solutions and coordinated service delivery.
- Ensure the blueprint addresses the needs of the partnership's dual customers and equity goals.

4b. Examine and implement service strategies through an equity lens.

- Focus on economically thriving jobs with meaningful pathways.
- Emphasize diversifying talent pipelines and ensure equitable access to workforce and education programs, services, and supports.
- Identify strategies to include input from historically marginalized populations when designing, delivering, and evaluating a system.

Element 5: Continuous Improvement and Evolution to Align with Changing Needs

Partners identify outcome measures and establish a process for assessing and managing performance over time that considers changes in the regional economy, labor force, and customer needs.

Sub-elements

5a. Establish shared measures of success to measure progress on sector strategy initiatives.

- Develop common measures of success based on input from employer and career-seeking/current worker customers.
- Ensure continuing alignment with the vision and goals for community prosperity.

5b. Establish a process for continuous improvement.

- Address service gaps and identify opportunities to improve outcomes.
- Implement regular efforts to assess performance and make changes based on those assessments.
- Continuously identify shifts in employers' or career seekers' needs through regular feedback loops with customer audiences and regular analysis of data.

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