

Employer Engagement Strategy:

Building Quality Partnerships for Equitable Opportunity

I. Overview

EmployIndy's Business Partnership Team aims to connect Eastside residents to quality, career-advancing employment by cultivating strong, reciprocal relationships with employers that align with the Choice Employer criteria. The strategy establishes a structured process to identify, qualify, and grow employer relationships in and around the District, while honoring and building upon existing partnerships maintained by community-based organizations. The ultimate goal is to create a coordinated, inclusive system that produces consistent talent pipelines, work-based learning experiences, and sustainable wage growth for residents.

II. Guiding Principles

Good Jobs First – Prioritize partnerships with employers who demonstrate a commitment to job quality by aligning their practices with the four Choice Employer pillars: Career Pathways, Culture and Diversity, Employee Supports, and the Good Wages Initiative (GWI). We will use a rubric-based scale to assess each employer's alignment and identify those most committed to advancing job quality.

Currently, the GWI standard is \$18/hour with benefits, though this threshold is under active review and expected to increase to approximately \$22/hour. We are working in partnership with CICIP and the Indy Chamber to finalize and publicly announce the updated benchmark.

Community Alignment – Leverage existing employer relationships built by trusted neighborhood partners and coordinate outreach to avoid duplication.

Data-Driven Development – Use EmployIndy's CRM and labor market analytics to identify and monitor employers along a structured engagement continuum. To strengthen this data-informed approach, we would like the opportunity to utilize funds to purchase LMI system licenses for three members of our Business Development team at an estimated \$15,000. These licenses will provide critical access to real-time labor market information and sector insights.

Sector Focus and Measurable Results – Target four key industries—Healthcare, Manufacturing, Construction, and Human Services—that show strong job demand and alignment with residents' skill-building potential.

III. Employer Readiness Process

Before formal engagement, each prospective employer partner will undergo a readiness and suitability assessment to ensure alignment with the initiative's job quality and workforce priorities.

Step 1: Preliminary Screening

- Confirm the employer operates within or near the designated Eastside zip codes.
- Verify industry alignment (Healthcare, Manufacturing, Construction, Human Services).
- Review company size, workforce demand, and job posting trends.

Step 2: Good Wages Initiative Alignment

- Evaluate compensation, benefits, and advancement opportunities against EmployIndy's GWI criteria.
- Confirm the ability to provide a living wage and benefits consistent with Choice Employer standards. This would not eliminate a potential partner but could factor into types of engagement opportunities as well as "champion" status.

Step 3: Workplace Culture and Inclusivity Assessment

- Gauge openness to inclusive hiring practices (e.g., reentry or second-chance employment).
- Assess capacity to host trainees and provide supervision, mentoring, or WBL opportunities.
- Identify job readiness competencies by occupation and employer. EmployIndy will document these competencies to ensure alignment between employer expectations and CBO-led assessment and readiness efforts.

Step 4: Capacity and Commitment Review

- Evaluate hiring projections, workforce turnover, and ability to participate in WBL.
- Confirm willingness to engage in roundtables, advisory input, and curriculum feedback.
- Coordinate with EmployIndy and community partners to avoid duplication.

Step 5: Partnership Onboarding

- Document commitments via a standardized MOU for work-based learning engagements.

- Add the employer to the CRM to track items such as contact history, activity engagement types, and follow-up schedule. Conduct an onboarding meeting or site visit to establish communication protocols and feedback loops.

This structured process ensures that employer partners are both mission-aligned and equipped to provide sustainable, quality employment opportunities.

IV. Targeted Training Goals

Following this structured readiness process, EmployIndy will strategically engage employers who demonstrate alignment with job quality priorities and sector-specific workforce needs. These partnerships are essential to advancing the District's talent pipeline and ensuring that training investments translate into real employment outcomes. To that end, EmployIndy's Business Partnership Team will support the following annual trainee goals:

- 50 Healthcare trainees (CNA, MA, QMA)
- 25 Manufacturing trainees (Certified Production Technician, CNC)
- 25 Construction trainees (NCCER, Maintenance Tech)
- 20 Human Services trainees (Case Management, Customer Service)

In addition to these trainee outcomes, EmployIndy will build employer partner capacity to support the District, ensuring deepest engagement of a minimum of five employers per sector.

V. Employer Engagement Continuum

Building on the employer readiness assessment and sector-specific training goals, EmployIndy will implement a multi-year engagement strategy to cultivate and strengthen employer partnerships across the Eastside.

In Year 1, EmployIndy will conduct a landscape analysis to establish a baseline of employer relationships currently held by EEMD partners and assess the density of engagement. From this analysis, baseline metrics will be determined for total number of employers currently engaged; number needed at each level of the employer continuum; number of employers by sector needed to offer work-based learning experiences; and number of employers meeting current wage standard and number of employers needed as designated champions.

Over the next four years, EmployIndy will seek to increase engaged employers by 20%, active employers by 10% and secure at least 1 employer champion for the district per sector in **year 2**. In **year 3**, increase engaged employers by 30% and increase active employers by 20% while adding at least 1 additional employer champion per sector. In **year 4**, EmployIndy seeks to maintain at least 70% engagement of engaged and active employers while adding an additional employer champion per sector. By year 5, secure at least 5 champions per sector.

To support these multi-year goals and track progress over time, employers will advance through clearly defined stages of engagement, monitored within EmployIndy's CRM system: Prospect → Engaged Partner → Active Partner → Champion. Examples of this continuum could be defined as:

- Prospect: Identified as a potential employer based on sector and geography.
- Engaged Partner: Participates in discussions, hiring events, or roundtables.
- Active Partner: Collaborates actively on training or hiring initiatives. Host and/or hire at least 2 trainees or other EEMD referrals per year.
- Champion: Sustained, high-impact partnership with guaranteed interviews, paid WBL, alignment with Choice Employer priorities, host and/or hire at least 5 trainees or other EEMD referrals per year

Each employer's stage, communication history, placements, and outcomes will be tracked in EmployIndy's CRM with reporting to measure progress, impact, and retention.

VI. Communication, Hiring Events, and Continuous Feedback

To strengthen collaboration and streamline communication, the District will implement a multi-channel engagement system:

- District-Specific Hiring Events: Host 2 targeted hiring and networking events at EEMD partner locations for business partners, allowing employers to meet trainees, conduct on-site interviews, and collaborate with EmployIndy and community partners.
- Continuous Feedback Loop: Establish a structured feedback system connecting employers, trainees/employees, community partners, and EmployIndy to share updates, resolve challenges, and improve processes in real time.
- Quarterly "District Workforce Briefing" Newsletter: Highlights training outcomes, employer spotlights, and upcoming opportunities.
- Biannual Employer Roundtables: Facilitate collaboration, data-sharing, and curriculum alignment.
- Monthly Community Partner Coordination Calls: Keep EMCC, JBNC, SECS, and EmployIndy aligned on employer leads and training outcomes.
- Annual "State of the Workforce District" Report: Recognize Employer Champions, celebrate milestones, and plan for the upcoming year.

This system ensures a consistent two-way flow of communication, enabling employers to share hiring needs quickly while partners and trainees gain visibility into opportunities and feedback from participating businesses.

VII. Enhancing District Capacity Beyond Employer Partnerships

EmployIndy anticipates a phased implementation approach, beginning with foundational activities in Year 1 to establish employer partnerships, align community-based organizations, and refine sector strategies. While full-scale training programs are scheduled to launch in Fall 2026, early efforts will focus on deepening employer engagement, identifying job readiness expectations, and equipping CBOs to prepare participants for future work-based learning opportunities.

To support this early ramp-up and ensure meaningful engagement for participants, EmployIndy will also activate its broader talent strategies around work experiences and talent connection. These initiatives will offer hands-on career exposure, job placement services, and structured pathways from training to employment, helping bridge the gap between workforce preparation and industry demand.

Work-Based Learning

To provide work-based learning activities, EmployIndy will activate its Talent Bound framework as a bridge between training and employment. By aligning career preparation with employer demand, hosting district-specific hiring events, and maintaining a real-time feedback loop among employers, partners, and EmployIndy, the District will build a sustainable, equitable workforce ecosystem. This approach transforms short-term training into long-term career stability—advancing the Eastside Economic Mobility District’s mission to connect residents to meaningful work, support employer competitiveness, and cultivate shared prosperity across Indianapolis’s Eastside.

This strategy also builds on EmployIndy’s Talent Bound career-connected learning framework, which guides young people through the stages of exploration, engagement, and experience. The Business Partnership Team applies these same principles to adult workforce programming, creating a clear, evidence-based pathway from learning to employment. These activities could include exploration through employer panels that allow for industry exploration and insights into industry expectations. Engagement activities such as industry tours allow insights into the day to day activities at a worksite and an experience through paid on-the-job training for identified trainees; while others may transition into direct employment

This adult adaptation of the Talent Bound model allows the team to provide a structured bridge from training to career placement, ensuring that participants are not only qualified for high-demand roles but also supported and prepared to succeed and grow within them. We will collaborate with CBOs to determine the percentage of trainees who will participate in a work-based learning experience. In turn, employers benefit from a stronger, more reliable local talent pipeline with reduced onboarding costs and improved retention outcomes.

Talent Connection

To support seamless transitions from training to employment, EmployIndy will deploy its Talent Connection team to provide job placement services for trainees who are not immediately hired upon program completion. This team serves as a dedicated recruitment function, connecting job-ready residents to quality employment opportunities.

Talent Connection differs from the role of career coaches and job developers embedded within community-based organizations. While career coaches focus on participant readiness (e.g., goal setting, barrier removal, and support services) and job developers focus on generating employer leads within specific CBO networks, Talent Connection functions as a centralized placement team. They work across employer partnerships to pre-screen candidates, match them to open roles, and support onboarding—ensuring a tighter feedback loop between training, coaching, and hiring outcomes.

The Talent Connection team will assist with post-training placement services to ensure that all program completers receive support—even those not hired right away. This includes matching trainees to roles that reflect both employer needs and Choice Employer criteria, such as good wages, advancement pathways, and inclusive practices.

To strengthen these outcomes, EmployIndy will also implement a placement funnel that reflects the likelihood of each participant transitioning into either paid work-based learning or direct employment. This funnel will be informed by individual readiness, sector-specific demand, and employer hiring preferences—enabling a more efficient and intentional match between Eastside talent and available job opportunities.

VIII. Conclusion & Budget Considerations

The Eastside Economic Mobility District strategy represents a bold and collaborative effort to connect residents to high-quality careers, strengthen employer partnerships, and build a more inclusive, equitable workforce ecosystem. By aligning employer engagement, talent development, work-placed learning, and job placement strategies under a unified framework—supported by initiatives like Choice Employers, Talent Bound, and Talent Connection—EmployIndy is prepared to lead the coordination necessary to meet the District’s long-term goals.

To implement this strategy, the core projected budget includes staffing and operational costs for Executive Leadership and the Business Partnership Team—critical roles that will lead coordination, employer engagement, and strategic oversight. These baseline costs reflect the foundational capacity needed to build and sustain employer relationships across sectors and drive job quality outcomes.

In addition, we have identified key supplemental investments that would significantly enhance the District’s impact and operational effectiveness. These include a Talent Bound Manager, who would lead alignment with community-based organizations and

coordinate meaningful work-based learning experiences tailored to sector needs. A Recruitment Manager would oversee Talent Connection activities, providing targeted job placement support for trainees not immediately hired upon completing their training—ensuring continued momentum toward sustainable employment.

To guide these efforts with timely, sector-specific insights, we will require continued investment in a Labor Market Information (LMI) system to ensure all partners operate from a shared, data-informed understanding of high-demand occupations and evolving employer needs. In addition, there is a critical need for a CRM/Case Management system to support coordination across partners, track employer engagement, and monitor participant progress. While the total cost of this system is still being determined, it will be essential to maintaining visibility, accountability, and alignment throughout the District initiative.

These additional requests represent the resources needed to fully realize the strategy's vision and ensure participants experience seamless transitions from training to employment.

EmployIndy is committed to maximizing outcomes and demonstrating the return on investment through clear metrics, continuous feedback, and sustained employer and community engagement.