

India-US Workforce Development Coalition: ACTION AGENDA

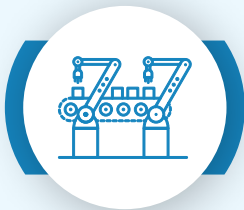
In October 2024, the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), with support from Cognizant Philanthropies, launched the **India-US Workforce Development Coalition**, a multisector project designed to spur, launch, sustain and scale workforce development-centered partnerships between US community colleges and Indian counterparts.

The inaugural activity of the Coalition was the **India-US Workforce Partnership Workshop**, which convened more than 30 representatives of key government agencies, industry, and higher education institutions in both countries to discuss existing and potential joint initiatives.

With a dual focus on broad strategy and operationalizing collaboration, Workshop participants shared perspectives and ideas on the following topics: 1) priority industries for workforce development in both countries; 2) skills needed for workforce success; and 3) models for bilateral partnerships. Their recommendations, summarized below, shaped the Coalition's "action agenda" and will continue to inform next steps throughout the project.

Workforce Needs: Emerging and Interconnected Industries

The following four industry categories and specific domains within them were identified as high-need areas for workforce development in both countries, and fields in which complementary strengths and capacity could be brought together for mutually beneficial bilateral collaborations.



Advanced manufacturing:
robotics; semiconductors
and microchips



**Infrastructure
development:**
transportation;
construction; disaster
management



Global health: food
security; (EMS); nursing
and eldercare; wellness



Lifestyle: fashion; social
media management



In addition, the following areas were identified as playing an increasingly critical role in these and other industries, thus meriting attention in workforce development initiatives and collaborations in and across all fields:



Cybersecurity



Artificial intelligence



Data analytics



Sustainability



Entrepreneurship

Skills: A Holistic Approach

While conversations about workforce development often center on industry-specific competencies, Workshop participants emphasized the need to take a broader view of what skills workers need to succeed throughout the career lifecycle, and to contribute effectively to employers, their chosen fields, and to society more broadly. They recommended a holistic educational approach to designing collaborations, and incorporating multiple layers of skills and competencies.

“How-to” training. Workshop participants acknowledged that hands-on, “how-to” training is an important component of workforce development, underscoring the need for internships, apprenticeships, and other opportunities for students to gain industry experience in real-time throughout their educational programs.

Industry-specific fundamentals. Workshop participants emphasized that real-time training on current technologies, while necessary, is not sufficient. Given the rapid pace of technological change in the high-need areas identified, it is critical for students and workers to gain an understanding of and fluency in the fundamental concepts within these fields that underpin the application of different technologies and methods (e.g. basic anatomy for healthcare workers, physics for construction managers). Understanding these fundamentals will allow workers to more quickly assess the potential of new technologies that emerge, and learn to apply them more effectively.

“Human Endurance Skills.” In addition to field-specific knowledge, Workshop participants identified the need for what Michael Hines, National Director of Education Initiatives at Trane, has termed “human endurance skills” that prepare students for success throughout their careers, and will allow them to adapt to and enter industries that do not yet exist. These include: 1) basic math, reading and writing; 2) critical thinking; 3) problem solving; 4) cross-cultural communication and competence; and 5) the ability to learn new technologies.

Interdisciplinarity. Given the interconnectedness of the high-need industries identified, and the breadth of skills required for effective workforce participation, Workshop participants emphasized the need for interdisciplinarity and creativity in designing workforce development curricula, programs, and collaborations. Looking beyond traditionally siloed academic departments, drawing expertise and models from an array of fields, and incorporating multiple modalities will maximize effectiveness and outcomes of joint initiatives.

Collaboration: Establishing Ecosystems

Workshop participants recognized the power of the different perspectives and expertise they brought to the table given their varied backgrounds, and emphasized the importance of such cross-sector engagement in establishing workforce-focused collaborations. They suggested an “ecosystems” approach to create an engaged network of individuals, organizations, activities, and supports to sustain joint workforce development initiatives.

Go deep to go broad. While great potential for mutually beneficial bilateral collaboration encompassing a variety of industries and modalities was widely acknowledged among Workshop participants, they suggested identifying one industry to start with, and building out multifaceted, transformative collaborations in that area, that once established, can become a basis and model for expansion to other industries.

Engage industry from the start. Workshop participants highlighted that a key strength of US community colleges and similar institutions in India is their existing deep industry and employer partnerships. Engaging these partners from the initial program design stage for bilateral collaborations will ensure that their workforce needs are addressed, and will provide pathways for hands-on training in both countries.

Focus on faculty. Recognizing that faculty are the lynchpins of student learning, Workshop participants recommended providing faculty with opportunities to upgrade their knowledge through bilateral collaboration – both to incorporate new insights into their course curricula for students, and with a “train the trainer” mindset so that faculty can potentially work with peers at their own institutions to amplify and disseminate the new knowledge gained.

Build institutional capacity. Considering factors that contribute to successful, sustained partnerships, Workshop participants emphasized the importance of institution-wide commitment and engagement of key stakeholders. While faculty and administrative staff drive partnership operations, institution leadership and governing bodies have a critical role to play in setting the tone for the collaboration, articulating its importance and connection to institutional mission and goals, and directing resources.

Ensure reciprocal partnerships. While different partners possess different assets and face different challenges, Workshop participants agreed that it is crucial that collaborators are considered to be equal partners, that they approach joint endeavors with a mindset of mutual learning, and that all parties benefit from the relationship.

Develop credentials that will be recognized in both countries. US community colleges and similar institutions in India are adept at developing industry-specific certifications and credentials with input from industry and navigating regional and national accreditation requirements. Joint development of credentials that meet industry needs and provide meaningful information to potential employers about students’ competencies will be important to maximize the long-term relevance and impact of partnerships.

Target particular sectors of Indian higher education. Given the expansiveness of higher education in India, Workshop participants recommended targeting particular sectors that may be especially well positioned for collaboration with US community colleges. These include private higher education institutions, polytechnic colleges, and technical institutes, which Workshop participants suggested would be best positioned to bring an innovation mindset and openness to interdisciplinary approaches.

Understand and leverage technology usage. Workshop participants noted that India is generally a “mobile first” environment, and recommended that in designing collaborative endeavors, it will be important to assess available technologies and provide multiple platforms to meet students and other participants where they are in terms of technology habits.

Explore multiple modalities for collaboration. International education experts among the Workshop participants highlighted an array of activity types that could be incorporated into partnerships, and encouraged a multi-faceted mindset and approach. Potential activities include: 1) student and faculty mobility; 2) virtual exchange; 3) internships; 4) collaboration on applied research projects; and 5) sharing of technology and resources.

Action Plan

Carrying forward the recommendations that emerged from the Workshop, ACCT will lead the following activities to build and expand the India-US Workforce Coalition, and advance its objective of establishing pathways for effective and enduring bilateral collaboration.

Execute the India-US Partnership Lab. This program will pair two US community colleges and two Indian institutions to develop initial collaborative activities, such as student and faculty exchanges, and build capacity for on-going and expanded engagement. The Partnership Lab will serve as a real-time case example for workforce-focused partnership development that will provide lessons learned and a model for further collaboration.

Establish an on-going working group. In parallel to the Partnership Lab, ACCT will convene a subset of Workshop participants to accelerate the development of additional partnerships. This working group will: 1) determine an initial industry to focus on; 2) assess and align with relevant government policies and opportunities in both countries and identify where advocacy may be needed; 3) map industry stakeholders and potential funding sources; 4) identify interested US community colleges and Indian counterparts with robust programs and facilities to support collaborative activities; and 5) develop operational models.

Convene a follow-on Workforce Partnership Workshop. A second Workforce Partnership Workshop will take place in Washington, DC in July/August 2025. Government, industry, and higher education leaders will review progress made in the Partnership Lab and by the working group, and will focus on how to scale and expand initial collaborations.

Continue to build a bilateral network. ACCT will continue to disseminate Workshop findings, and will share progress with the higher education, workforce development and industry communities in both countries. A pre-conference or concurrent session will take place at ACCT’s Leadership Congress in New Orleans in October 2025, to share outcomes with ACCT membership and catalyze further interest among ACCT member colleges.

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