WHIIEC

WASHINGTON
HEALTH INFORMATION
INDUSTRY-EDUCATION COUNCIL

A Primer: Starting a Health Information Industry-Education Council (HIIEC)

Health Information Industry-Education Council HIIEC

Startup Primer Outline

I. Context/Rationale

1. Why a HIIEC?

2. Who Starts a HIIEC?

3. How Does a HIIEC work?

4. What Does a HIIEC do?

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II. First Steps: Overcoming Inertia

1. Early Adopter reaches out to stakeholders (ideally on both sides of table – Employers and Education Institutions) and structures council in terms of mutual benefit.

2. Get buy-in of *relevant* stakeholders (knowledgeable, influential, with access to resources)

   - Potential convener & facilitator: Stakeholder but neutral across conflicting interests, Respected & influential, has resources to support launch if possible

   - Relevant representatives of major constituencies: Educators, employers, others (vendors, recruiters, outplacement, secondary educators, prospective students)

3. Convener calls first meeting of initial stakeholders

   - Use a qualified neutral facilitator

   - Have a *draft* mission statement to work on

   - Have draft operational principles (e.g. succession, meeting calendar &location)

   - Identify additional key stakeholders, secure commitments to recruit

   - Identify baseline workforce development information, gap analysis

III. Subsequent Steps: Support and Maintenance

1. Identify & assign staff resources (preferably affiliated w/ convener)

2. Establish interaction platform (e.g. restricted online portal) with rules

3. Identify & pursue funding opportunities

4. Identify & develop targets of opportunity for funding, partnership, promotion & outreach; Identify tasks to accomplish them, make assignments (leverage resources of constituencies represented).

5. Evaluate performance, refine priorities & resource allocation, perform a reality check about council continuing if needed.

6. Develop additional resources as needed.

I. Context/Rationale

Why a HIIEC?

Employers in the health information field face increasing challenges in meeting their staffing and consulting needs--they report longer searches and increased difficulty meeting program targets as the shortage of skilled personnel becomes more acute in all phases from system architecture through business intelligence/data analytics. There is a growing awareness that workforce development in the field must be collaboratively pursued by health IT users and educators partnering to ensure that existing and prospective health IT workers have the skills to match projected staffing needs. The HIIEC is a valuable tool to start and sustain this collaboration. It allows for dialogue to identify what employers need and how they can work together with educators to address those needs. The HIIEC can also be a platform to produce data resources like state or regional analyses of education resources and employer needs.

There is no one set of rigid rules for how to initiate a HIIEC: Each HIIEC is the product of its own circumstances and stakeholder relationships, but the following ideas have proven to provide useful guidance in practical application.

Who Starts a HIIEC?

Champion(s): Like any new endeavor a HIIEC requires one or more stakeholders who recognize the need for employer-educator collaboration and has the contacts, energy and perseverance to persuade others to join in the effort to make it happen. Such champions can come from the educator or employer communities, and it's not unusual for them to have experience in both.

How Does a HIIEC work?

Stakeholders: The challenge of developing tomorrow's health IT workforce touches a broad array of players in health care and information technology. Some are obvious, like hospitals/integrated delivery systems, community or tribal clinics, public health agencies and health care purchasers/insurers as well as postsecondary educators at the community or technical college and university level. Perhaps less obvious are stakeholders like IT systems vendors, professional recruiters and outplacement providers, policymakers in health IT promotion/diffusion and entities supporting other stakeholders like regional extension centers, veterans'/displaced workers' advocacy programs and career placement counselors. Each has its own needs and concerns and reasons to become engaged in the dialogue either as active members or resource individuals.

What Does a HIIEC do?

Resources: Initiating a HIIEC does not involve substantial initial investment. Its main resources are the subject matter expertise, contacts and engagement of its members and key informants. The main investment is some dedicated professional staff time, in the range of 25%-33% FTE for project coordination, member liaison and communication. Ideally this can be accomplished by carving out part of a staff role at the convener/facilitator's organization, both for operational efficiency and to take advantage of that individual's stature within the HIIEC.

As the HIIEC matures and becomes more active, a part of the staff role is to work on funding development for both the increased activity and the additional staff resources to support it.

Where are Opportunities for Growth?

Challenges: Despite the obvious benefits of employers and educators partnering to develop the workforce they need, building the HIIEC is subject to some challenges. An obvious one is that stakeholders have widely divergent and sometimes conflicting agendas and priorities. Within the health care provider community organizations are at different levels of readiness for health IT implementation and use, and with different levels of resources to bring to bear in meeting their staffing or consulting needs. Similarly, different educational institutions have divergent curriculum offerings targeted toward learners with different levels of preparation and resources for accessing educational opportunities.

A related challenge is that a HIIEC necessarily brings competitors or their representatives around the same table to discuss their needs and options, which risks exposing proprietary information. It will be necessary to keep interactions and information exchange at a level that can build mutual trust in dealing with common issues and concerns.

Rapid change in the health IT environment also makes it difficult to anticipate staffing level and skills needs in a realistic planning horizon for curriculum development and rollout. Many employers are challenged to anticipate needs even one year in advance let alone the two to three years needed to develop or substantially modify a certificate or degree program.

These are by no means the only challenges facing the nascent HIIEC but they give a preview of what should be expected and accommodated in launch and evolution of the council.

II. First Steps: Overcoming Inertia

Early Adopter(s) reach out to other stakeholders: The initial groundwork involves the champion(s) cultivating fellow stakeholders to introduce the concept and develop the constituency for a HIIEC. This may originate and focus within the champion's own community (educator or employer), but requires outreach to the wider range of stakeholders as well. That work can be facilitated if it's supported by an effective convener who has credibility across the range of stakeholders. There is something of a "chicken-and-egg" element to cultivating stakeholders and identifying the convener, but there needs to be at least enough interested stakeholders to justify the convener taking on the responsibility of leadership.

 Identify &recruit a convener/facilitator: To do its job, a HIIEC must bring together a wide range of divergent and sometimes competing viewpoints, priorities and agendas.   As noted above, the individual and his/her sponsoring organization are central to recruiting, motivating and leading HIIEC membership as well as keeping it on task as it pursues its work. This individual needs to have a stake in the council's success but be above competing interests—an honest broker among them. If the HIIEC is going to be at the state level, the governor's designated Health Information Technology Coordinator is a strong choice for this role. S/he brings both the policy imprimatur of the state and a substantive but noncompetitive interest in the HIIEC's success. His/her office may also have the staff, communication capability and other resources to support the council at least initially. If the HIIEC is multistate, regional or local, other appropriate conveners with similar relationships to the other stakeholders should be identified.

Recruit representatives of all constituencies: Because of the wide variation in their needs, priorities and perspectives, fairly granular differences among stakeholders need to be captured. For example, tribal clinics have different recruiting issues from their community and migrant counterparts. Both recruiters and outplacement specialists should be included to flesh out the gaps between employer expectations and candidate skillsets and/or academic preparation.   Education programs ranging from technical certification to postgraduate degrees, both residential and online, should be represented, and the local regional extension center can provide valuable insight into the particular challenges and needs of the most isolated and challenged employers. To the extent possible, each constituency should be represented by its professional or industrial association speaking on behalf of the whole constituency (e.g. hospital represented by a State Hospital Association

member who reports back to all member hospitals.) It is also desirable to recruit representatives with experience as both health IT employers and educators where possible.

The organizational meeting: The first meeting of the HIIEC will do much to establish its chances for success. In addition to having representation from all relevant constituencies, three additional elements are important.

- After the welcome and context-setting introduction by the convener, the meeting should be conducted by an independent—preferably professional—facilitator, to keep participants on task and allow the convener to participate in his/her stakeholder role.

- A draft charter or statement of purpose should be distributed beforehand because its review, revision and acceptance will be the meeting's first order of business. Also Have draft operational principles (e.g., member succession, meeting calendar &location) for consideration and adoption by the council.

- Both the convener's introductory statement and draft charter/statement of purpose should strongly emphasize that the HIIEC's main objective is to create active partnership/collaboration between employers and educators, not simply passive exchange of information.

The organizational meeting should also identify additional stakeholder constituencies to bring to the table, major available resources like datasets and subject matter expertise and logistical/operational considerations. Identify baseline workforce development information, gap analysis available, and any other resources already developed.

III. Subsequent Steps: Support and Maintenance

Following the launch of the HIIEC, the support tasks of keeping it going take over. While these are similar to any organizational startup they have some unique characteristics in the HIIEC context.

Assign staff responsibility: From the start the HIIEC will have at least minimal staff requirements. It is desirable that this be housed in the organization of the convener, partly because the HIIEC will likely not have its own financial resources initially but also to lend his/her credibility and authority to staff functions. Staff is responsible for scheduling and recording meetings, maintaining document archives, maintaining the website or other communication, responding to member queries, recruiting members and speakers, etc. As

the HIIEC matures additional duties might include fund development, projects like employer surveys and representation at conferences and other events.

Establish a member interaction platform: A secure online platform such as a Sharepoint or cloud-based site is an important vehicle for sharing HIIEC-related information. It serves as a virtual forum where members can post articles of interest or their own opinions, initiate and participate in discussions and access meeting documents and other information materials. It is important that it be accessible to all members regardless of the filters and security barriers at their individual organizations.

Identify and pursue funding opportunities: The HIIEC's ability to provide useful constituent services is strongly influenced by the resources at its disposal. Not only staff support but publishing/media resources, consulting/research, travel, electronic subscriptions and multiple other activities are contingent on actively developing funding sources. Aggressively tracking opportunities and skillfully making the HIIEC's case for funding are essential functions, whether at the staff level or as an adjunct to member development initiatives. Parallel with monitoring the funding environment for the HIIEC itself, tracking opportunities and alerting membership as appropriate is a valuable member service.

Identify and develop service opportunities: As the HIIEC matures and develops its knowledge base about how educators and employers can partner to develop the workforce needed, opportunities for useful HIIEC activities will suggest themselves. Some obvious examples include employer surveys of anticipated staffing/consulting needs, representation at professional conferences, developing skillset/position classification crosswalks, etc. What opportunities make sense for a given HIIEC will be a function of member and staff perceptions of what is useful and feasible in that HIIEC's situation; there is no standard set of activities to fit all HIIECs.

Evaluate performance: The HIIEC should develop and track metrics for its performance against objectives. For external funding some such metrics may be specified by the funder, but to the extent the HIIEC can define them itself, such metrics should allow trending over time, be efficient and economical to track and provide guidance to opportunities for improvement.

Develop additional resources: As new opportunities are identified, resource constraints will tend to inhibit pursuing them until new resources are developed. Funding tends to follow specific initiatives, so the HIIEC should be prepared to commit some portion of its existing funds to developing additional resources in response to such opportunities.