# Talent Pipeline Management:
# A Case Study Analysis of Best Practices and Common Challenges

# Contents

# Introduction

Over the past few decades, increasing attention has been paid to workforce development strategy, and for good reason. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, approximately six million jobs went unfilled in 2019.[1] Skills mismatch between job positions and applicants, rapid technological changes, and policies that tend to be reactive rather than proactive further hamper meaningful employment. The federal government spends billions of dollars annually to operate more than three dozen disparate jobs training programs. On top of that, states and localities have created localized training programs themselves. Despite these many efforts, there is no concrete 'what works' strategy for workforce development.

Recognizing this void, in 2014 the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (Chamber Foundation) introduced Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM), an innovative approach to closing the skills gap by applying lessons from supply chain management to workforce partnerships. The crux of the program relies on employers working together, using internal, proprietary data, to identify shared pain points. Following that analysis, employers work with the necessary stakeholders, such as education and training providers, to develop sustainable talent pipelines and apply solutions to employers' most pressing pain points while improving outcomes for learners and workers. Throughout the past six years, close to 400 people have participated in a TPM Academy®, where workforce leaders learn about the TPM approach and return to their local communities to take the methodology from theory to practice.

With collaboratives now established in more than 30 industries across 36 states, the Chamber Foundation has learned a lot about best practices and common challenges associated with launching and managing TPM employer collaboratives. This report captures what the Chamber Foundation and its partners have learned to date to benefit current practitioners as they develop and enhance their own TPM projects. It can also be useful for future practitioners who are still learning about TPM and how it can add value to their workforce partnerships.

The report is broken into three sections. First, there will be an overview of the TPM approach and how it differs from existing workforce development strategies. Second, findings from a national survey of TPM participants facilitated in conjunction with the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC) will be presented. And lastly, there is a detailed comparative analysis of survey results and focus group takeaways from two states that have been engaged in TPM implementation: Michigan and Kentucky. The analysis highlights progress made with TPM in each state, and discusses the key challenges and success factors that have influenced their work to date.

1   Allen, H. and S. Skopovi. (September 2020). Job openings and labor turnover trends for Metropolitan Statistical Areas in 2019. Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-9/job-openings-and-labor-turnover-trends-for-msas.htm.

# 6 million

## jobs went unfilled in 2019.

# Nuts and Bolts of Talent Pipeline Management

First developed as a white paper concept in 2014, TPM is organized around supply chain management principles. TPM provides a systematic, replicable framework where employers are in charge and drive change. To support learning of those who want to use the framework, the Chamber Foundation created an expansive curriculum that is used to facilitate TPM Academy trainings for chamber of commerce, economic development, and other education and workforce leaders.

Exhibit 1 details each strategy that makes up the TPM approach. The first strategy involves laying the groundwork for establishing employer collaboratives and socializing 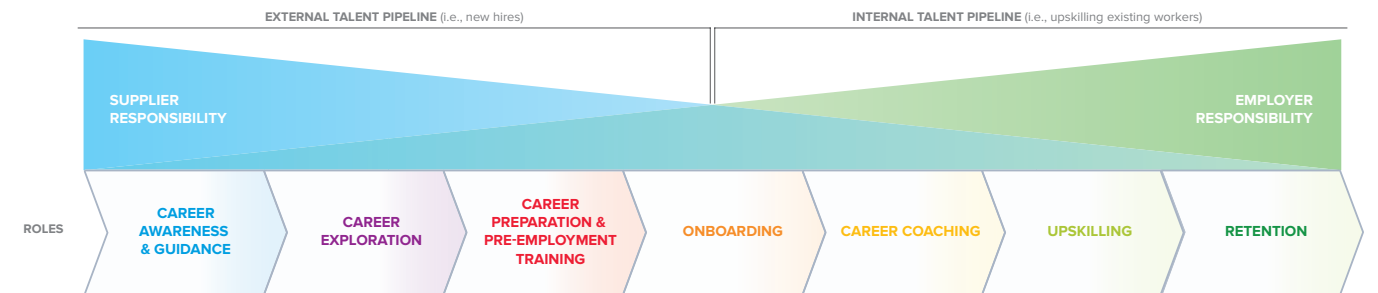the community to TPM through an orientation. Once back in their home communities, Academy participants who assume the role of host organization (those who oversee and manage the activities of the employers) start organizing their collaboratives made up of employers who share a common pain point, such as unfilled job openings, turnover, or lack of a diversified workforce. The next three steps are engaging in demand planning for critical jobs, defining competency and credential requirements, and identifying current and potential sources of talent. Strategy five focuses on identifying and working with preferred training and education providers to co-engineer internal and external talent pipelines. The final strategy is continuous improvement.

A key tenet to TPM is that employers are the end-customers of the talent supply chain. To be satisfied as an end-customer, the employers must decide which jobs are most critical to their operations, and subsequently which skills and attributes associated with those jobs are most necessary. By driving the process, employers ensure that their needs are clearly communicated and that their partners have the resources (financial and non-financial) necessary to seamlessly transition a learner or worker from their education and training experience to employment, and beyond (e.g., career advancement). Exhibit 2 illustrates this flowchart.

**Exhibit 2: TPM Basic Value Stream Map**



EXTERNAL TALENT PIPELINE (i.e., new hires)  INTERNAL TALENT PIPELINE (i.e., upskilling existing workers)

SUPPLIER RESPONSIBILITY

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITY

ROLES | CAREER AWARENESS & GUIDANCE | CAREER EXPLORATION | CAREER PREPARATION & PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING | ONBOARDING | CAREER COACHING | UPSKILLING | RETENTION

**Exhibit 1: TPM Strategies**

TPM ORIENTATION

STRATEGY 1: ORGANIZE EMPLOYER COLLABORATIVES

STRATEGY 2: ENGAGE IN DEMAND PLANNING

STRATEGY 3: COMMUNICATE COMPETENCY & CREDENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

STRATEGY 4: ANALYZE TALENT FLOWS

STRATEGY 5: BUILD TALENT SUPPLY CHAINS

STRATEGY 6: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Some TPM Academy participants have used the TPM process to support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in workforce development. For instance, the Women Build 901 Too initiative in Memphis, TN is a collaborative aiming to increase female employment in the construction industry.

Anecdotally, one of the common reactions from key stakeholders when they hear about a new workforce development strategy is 'here we go again'. For many employers, they have attended sessions, worked with local leaders, and tried numerous workforce development techniques with varying success.

According to TPM participants, the program, at least at first glance, did not seem all that different from a sector strategies approach. Broadly defined, a sector strategies approach targets specific industries and occupations and is led by credible community organizations. While there are more nuanced differences between sector strategies and TPM, the primary one is the fact that employers lead the work of their collaboratives. As the TPM curriculum notes, other partnerships tend to engage employers as advisors. TPM transforms this paradigm, as they are the drivers of the process: employers are incentivized to produce results for themselves and to take an active leadership role and responsibility in building their talent supply chains. The Chamber Foundation touts the fact that employers reap their return on investment by filling jobs with qualified candidates and reducing the costs of talent recruitment and retention.

There are several short case studies highlighted on the Chamber Foundation website that illustrate TPM's success in communities. For instance, the Greater Houston Partnership established UpSkill Houston, a collaborative that focused on attracting workers to high-demand careers. The petrochemical sector saw a 32% increase in enrollment in relevant courses and a 42% increase in completion rates for those degrees at technical training programs after applying TPM. In Arizona, the Greater Phoenix Chamber Foundation created the Hospital Workforce Collaborative and discovered a common pain point was retaining nurses in six specialty areas. After working with the Maricopa County Community College District, and securing additional funding from the state, 300 students are projected to graduate through this new pipeline by 2021.

**First, the employers within the collaborative are the end-customers. To be satisfied as an end-customer, the employers must decide which jobs are most critical to their operations, and subsequently which skills and attributes associated with those jobs are most necessary.**

# National Leadership Network Survey

Due to the relatively short timeline since TPM's inception, a comprehensive evaluation of the TPM Academy curriculum, objectives, and outcomes has been lacking. To fill this void, the CREC developed a survey sent to nearly 360 TPM participants or partners across the country. Distributed in summer 2020, this comprehensive National Leadership Network survey received 68 responses (19% response rate) and seeks to evaluate the status of TPM collaboratives. The Chamber Foundation and CREC will publish a detailed analysis of these findings, but for the purposes of this report, the focus is common challenges and opportunities associated with forming and sustaining employer collaboratives.

As discussed in previous sections, employers drive the TPM process but must engage with critical partners along the way. **Figure 1** illustrates the variety of organizations represented by survey respondents. The majority of respondents represented two groups: chamber/business associations (35%) and educational organizations (34%). The remaining respondents represented workforce development boards (10%), economic development organizations (9%), employers (7%), and other organizations (4%).

**Figure 1: Survey Respondent Breakdown by Organization Type**



| | |
|---|---|
| ■ Educational Organization | ■ Chamber/Business Association |
| ■ Economic Development Organization | ■ Employer/Business Seeking Talent |
| ■ Other | ■ Workforce Development Board |
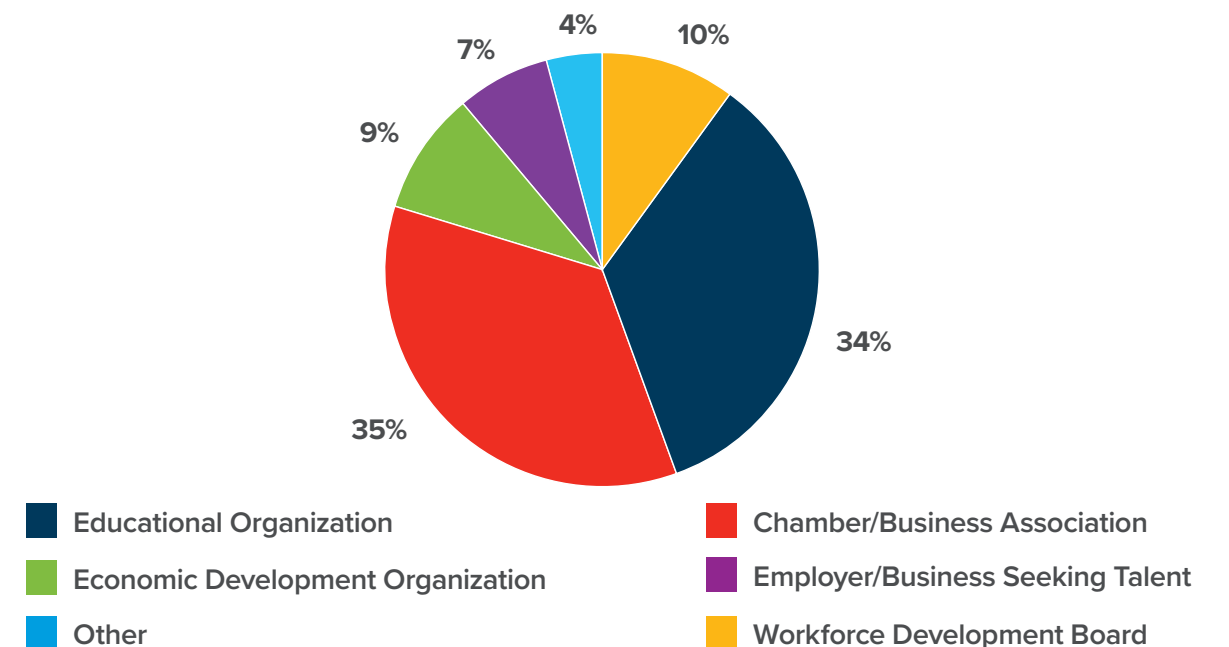
All respondents had attended or were participating in a TPM Academy, dating all the way back to the first cohorts in 2015–2017 (19%). Most of the respondents had attended in just the last two years, with 57% attending a TPM Academy in either 2019 (31%) or 2020 (26%). Some respondents had attended the TPM Academy, however their cohort was not identified (16%).

One of the advantages of the TPM framework is its replicability across many industries. The framework is industry and function agnostic, with the approach grounded in supply chain principles. Some TPM participants, especially those working on behalf of chambers and associations, have successfully managed collaboratives across different industries. **Figure 2** illustrates which industries have active employer collaboratives. Manufacturing (34%), health sciences or health care (29%), and architecture and construction (24%) are the top industries, which reflect national trends around the growing importance and demand for skill sets found in these industries.

**Figure 2: Industries Represented by Active Employer Collaboratives**
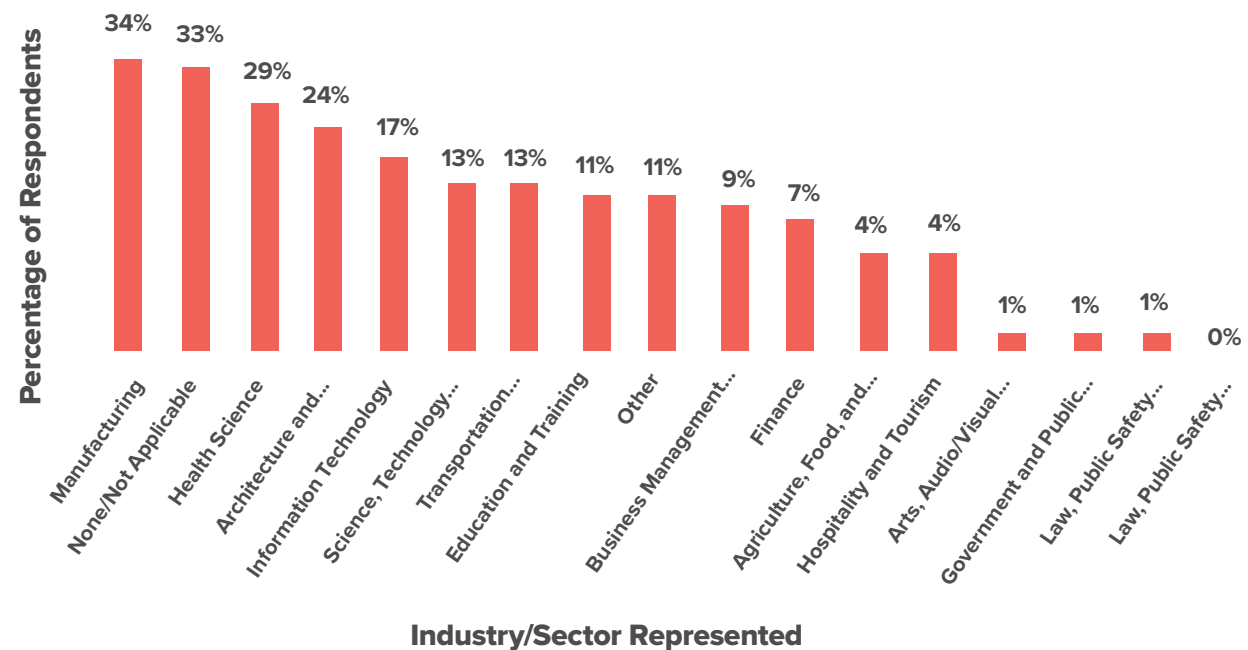


While TPM is growing in popularity and expanding rapidly across the country, there are a few key barriers impeding the ability of the program to reach its full potential. Survey respondents were asked to identify barriers standing in the way of starting or expanding their employer collaboratives. The majority of respondents identified employer engagement as the most critical challenge they face, far exceeding any other issue they have confronted (see **Figure 3**). Employer engagement was followed by employer resource constraints with just over a third of respondents, and host organization resource constraints identified by a quarter of respondents. Additional context to explain the nuances and interconnectedness of these challenges is presented later in this report.

**Figure 3: Barriers to Starting or Expanding Employer Collaboratives**
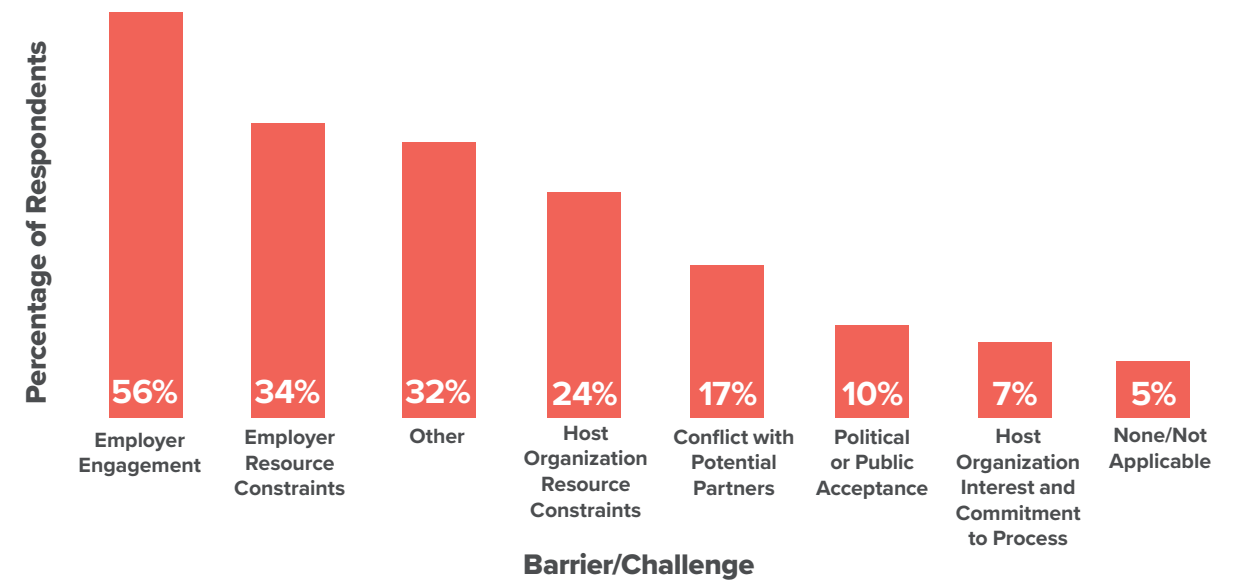


Even in the face of these challenges, as evidenced by the growth of TPM across the country, employer collaboratives have seen great success. In the national survey, respondents were asked to identify which factors were leading to positive outcomes. As seen in **Figure 4**, overwhelmingly, more than three-quarters (76%) of respondents identified "active employer engagement" as the top success factor for employer collaboratives. A majority (59%) felt that the second most important success factor was the host organization's interest and commitment to the TPM process. This was followed not far behind by agreement on priorities and actions among potential partners (51%). Of course, the ability of the host organization (44%) and employers (36%) to bring resources (i.e., funding) to the table were also important for success.

One of the advantages of the TPM framework is its replicability across many industries. The framework is industry and function agnostic, with the approach grounded in supply chain principles.

**Figure 4: Factors Most Important to Success of Collaboratives**
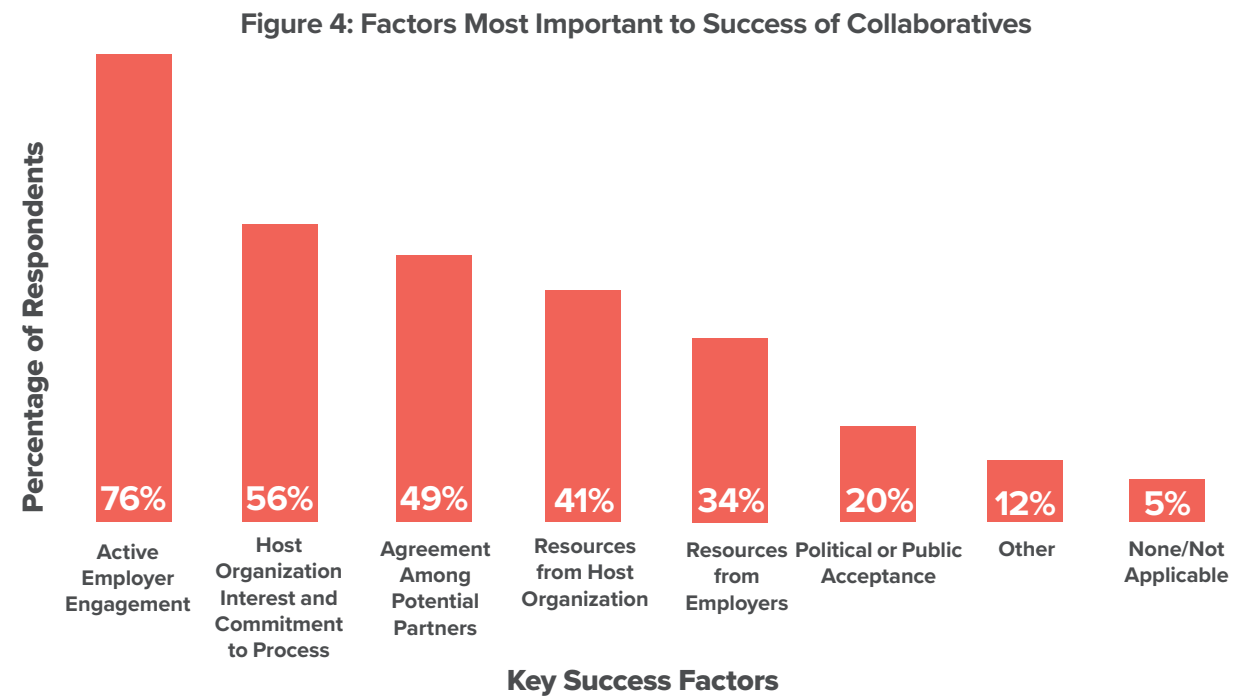


In addition to the National Learning Network survey, TPM practitioners in two states were asked to participate in a deeper analysis to understand underlying factors that lead to success and challenges for TPM implementation. Colleagues from Michigan and Kentucky provided a behind-the-scenes view of their TPM experiences via completing more in-depth surveys (having built off the National Learning Network survey running simultaneously) and participating in focus groups. As Michigan and Kentucky leaders frequently point out, both states have been supportive of one another's efforts and have leveraged each other's learnings to improve their respective state's TPM Academy experience as well as overall TPM implementation.

**The top three factors leading to positive outcomes, according to respondents, are:**

**1**
Active employer engagement

**2**
The host organization's interest and commitment to the TPM process

**3**
Agreement on priorities and actions among potential partners

# Michigan: Industry Sets the Tone

## Background

TPM has been an active strategy in Michigan since 2015 when its Michigan Energy Workforce Development Consortium, launched in 2009, participated in the original pilot. Led by TPM pilot members Consumers Energy and DTE Energy, the consortium quickly bought into the TPM approach after positive results for both companies and the broader energy and utilities industry in Michigan. Through leaders Tracy DiSanto (DTE) and Sharon Miller (Consumers Energy), a Michigan TPM steering committee formed to support Michigan's efforts to launch and grow a Michigan TPM network.

Under the leadership of Consumers Energy, and with support from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Michigan launched the first statewide TPM Academy in 2017. Miller recognized that leadership and sustainability were two important factors to work into a broader TPM adoption model, and identified four "hyper-developed" participants who would go through the TPM Academy experience and receive additional training from the Chamber Foundation so that they in turn could provide technical assistance to their colleagues, both within the initial Academy cohort as well as future TPM practitioners in Michigan. With a sincere interest in growing additional talent in Michigan even outside of the energy sector and establishing Michigan as a premier business destination, Consumers Energy hosted a second cohort in 2018, significantly increasing active collaboratives using the TPM methodology. To garner interest in the second training opportunity and broaden state leaders' understanding of TPM, Miller and the hyper-developed TPM leaders hosted workshops, seminars, and informational meetings for thousands of people.

Michigan's Academy participants have included state, regional, and local leaders from its Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, Michigan Works! Agencies, chambers of commerce, community colleges, industry associations, economic development organizations, and workforce nonprofit communities.

Today, DiSanto, Miller, and two additional Michigan TPM graduates serve as TPM Fellows, helping to expand the TPM network and share promising practices across the TPM National Learning Network. To date, Michigan has stood up 11 active TPM collaboratives engaging close to 100 employers across the state that address critical sectors including but not limited to manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, transportation and logistics, and construction.

## Michigan State Survey

To learn more about Michigan's approach to TPM, members of Michigan's TPM network were surveyed to assess progress, challenges, and opportunities. Of 25 respondents, 33% were from workforce agencies or boards; 16% were from local chambers of commerce or business associations; 12% were from economic development organizations; another 12% were participating employers; and 8% were from education institutions. Twenty-four of the 25 respondents had attended a TPM Academy, a significant majority (95%) of which did so in the last three years, having attended the state academies in 2017 and 2018 or a subsequent national cohort. As shown in **Figure 5**, nearly 78% have started or supported at least one employer collaborative since attending a TPM Academy, 89% of which indicated that they have used the TPM strategies or portions of the methodology to launch and advance their employer collaboratives.

**Figure 5: Employer Collaboratives Created Since Academy Participation**



Percentage of Respondents

| 22.2% | 61.1% | 11.1% | 5.6% |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

**Number of Collaboratives Formed**
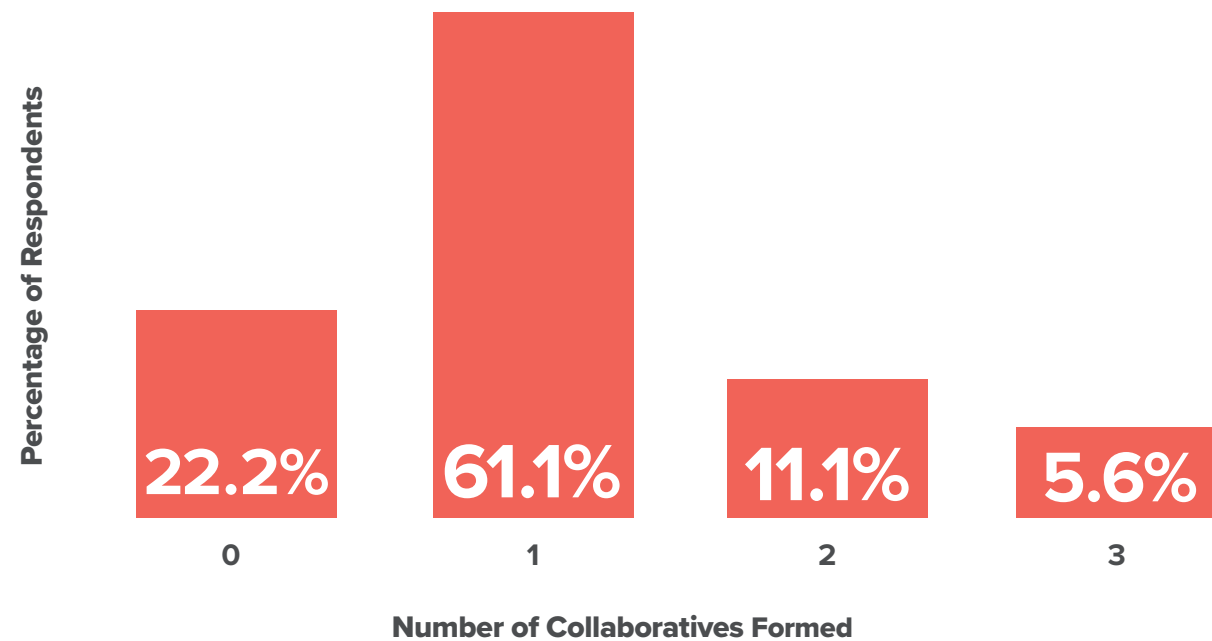
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, TPM was gaining momentum in Michigan. Of the survey respondents who have formed at least one collaborative, 50% said their most active collaboratives were formed in 2019, and another 22% said their most active was formed in 2020. Two-thirds of these respondents noted that at least one employer collaborative was still active as of February 2020, right before pandemic-induced economic shutdowns began. Nearly a quarter had multiple collaboratives still active. For remaining active employer collaboratives in Michigan, the industries represented include manufacturing, health sciences, IT, transportation & logistics, and architecture & construction (see **Figure 6)**. The collaboratives that were no longer active as of February 2020 fall along the same industry lines.

# 89%

of respondents indicated that they have used the TPM strategies to launch and advance their employer collaboratives

**Figure 6: Industries Represented by Employer Collaboratives**
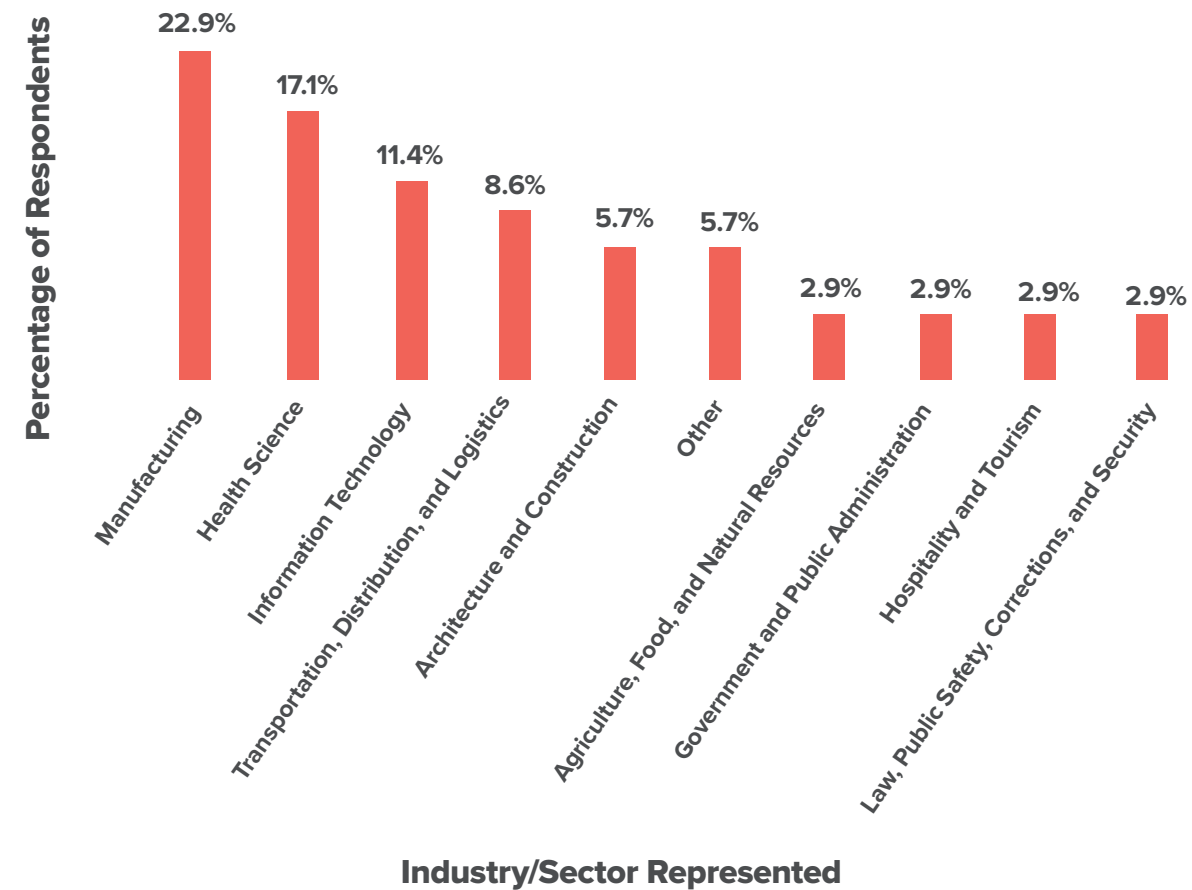


As shown in **Figure 7,** nearly two-thirds of survey respondents noted that their active collaboratives are just in the early stages of the TPM process or are just building momentum (the TPM Orientation or Strategy 1); unsurprising given how recently most of the active employer collaboratives were formed in the state. Just under half of respondents who have formed at least one TPM collaborative have advanced their collaboratives beyond Strategy 1 and are either currently working through or have surpassed the data collection and analysis strategies (Strategies 2–4 or beyond).
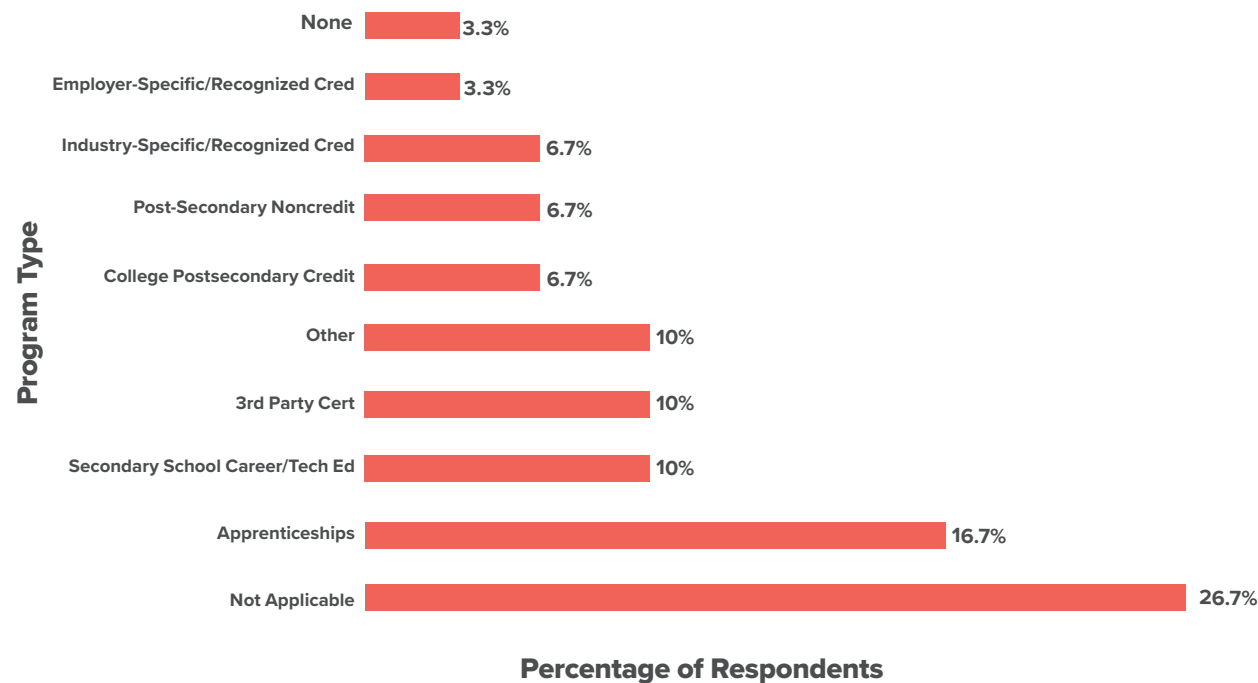
**Figure 7: Michigan Collaboratives by Stage of Development**
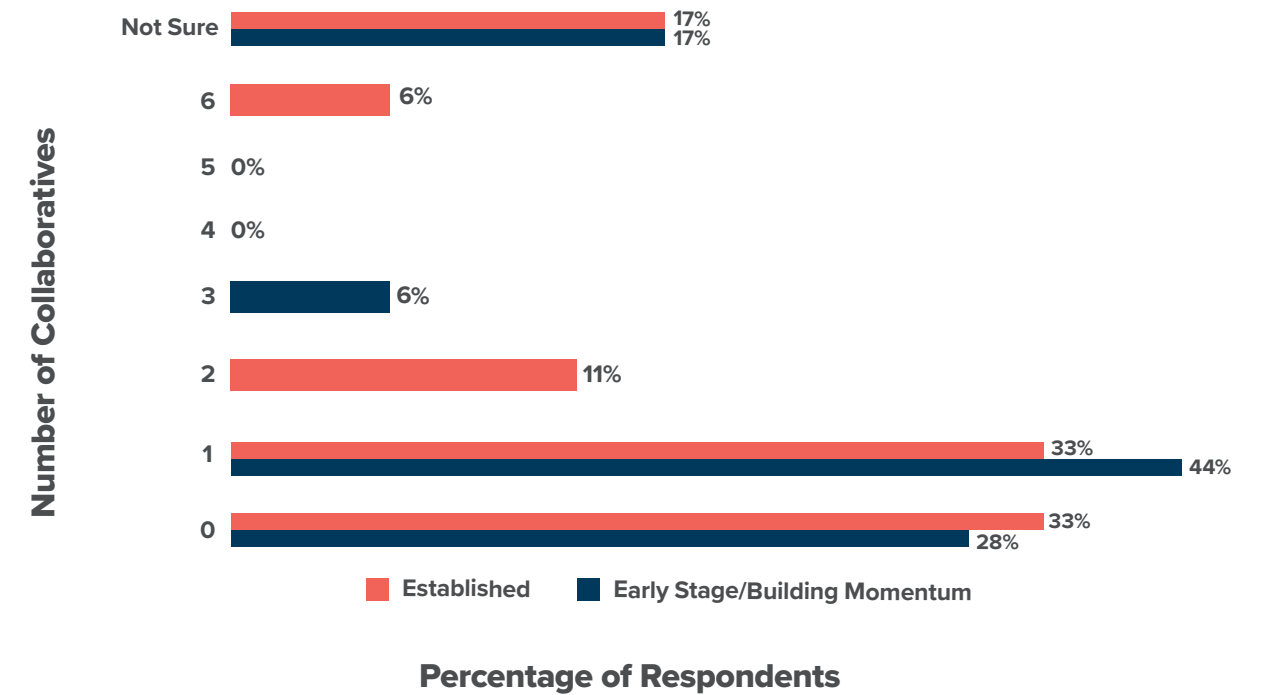


As a result of efforts so far in Michigan, a number of training and/or education programs have been created or adjusted to support skill supply needs of participating collaborative employers. The most common are apprenticeship programs, followed by secondary career and technical education programs, and third-party certifications. Just over a quarter of respondents said their collaboratives have not yet reached Strategy 5, which focuses on building talent supply chains with education and training providers (see **Figure 8**).

Prior to the 2020 pandemic, TPM was gaining momentum in Michigan. Of the survey respondents who have formed at least one collaborative, 50% said their most active collaboratives were formed in 2019.

**Figure 8: Education and Training Program Creation or Adjustment by Collaborative**

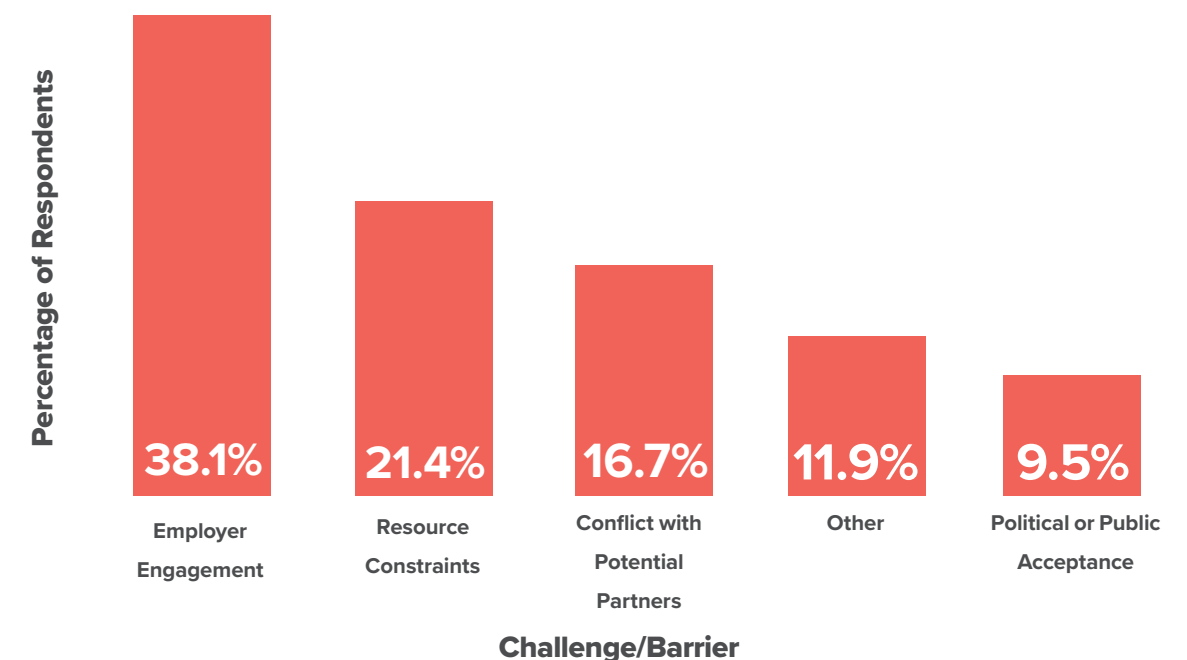| Program Type | Percentage of Respondents |
|---|---|
| None | 3.3% |
| Employer-Specific/Recognized Cred | 3.3% |
| Industry-Specific/Recognized Cred | 6.7% |
| Post-Secondary Noncredit | 6.7% |
| College Postsecondary Credit | 6.7% |
| Other | 10% |
| 3rd Party Cert | 10% |
| Secondary School Career/Tech Ed | 10% |
| Apprenticeships | 16.7% |
| Not Applicable | 26.7% |

## Michigan Focus Groups Discussions

To better understand challenges and opportunities for the Michigan TPM Network, two focus groups were hosted in September 2020 with a total of 14 representatives from across the state. Focus group discussion provided a deeper dive into questions posed in the Michigan TPM survey, including key challenges and success factors. Participants included TPM practitioners, TPM steering committee members, workforce agency leaders, TPM employer champions, education providers, and heads of interested industry associations.

Several industry sectors were represented including automotive manufacturing, energy, healthcare, garment manufacturing/fashion, chemical manufacturing, information technology (IT), and the skilled trades. Most participants or organizations represented in the focus groups had at least some form of TPM Academy training, including from the initial TPM Academy Cohort I in 2016 through TPM Academy National Cohort XVI in 2020. One of the organizations represented in the focus groups, DTE Energy, has been involved in the TPM movement since the pilot program.

# Michigan's Leading Challenges

While there have been successes in employing the TPM model in Michigan, challenges still exist in both the advancement and adoption of the methodology and achievement of significant progress with employer collaboratives. Survey respondents overwhelmingly identified employer engagement as the largest hurdle to overcome, followed by resource constraints, conflict with partners, and political or public acceptance (see **Figure 9**), each of which were discussed further with focus group participants.

**Figure 9: Barriers to Collaborative Launch and Implementation**

| Challenge/Barrier | Percentage of Respondents |
|---|---|
| Employer Engagement | 38.1% |
| Resource Constraints | 21.4% |
| Conflict with Potential Partners | 16.7% |
| Other | 11.9% |
| Political or Public Acceptance | 9.5% |

In focus group discussions, Michigan representatives were asked to elaborate on these challenges to get a better understanding of them, understand potential root causes, and to understand solutions employed to address them. Three major challenges surfaced as most significant.

# 1) Gaining and Sustaining Employer Engagement

As seen in **Figure 9**, overall employer engagement has been a challenge for nearly half of survey respondents. In focus group discussions, these challenges were echoed by nearly every participant. When asked to elaborate further, those in the focus group sessions referenced the difficulties they have experienced with keeping employers engaged from the very outset of forming a collaborative, and throughout implementation of the TPM strategies. Three categories of challenges to sustained employer interest surfaced in discussion: gaining initial employer interest, sustaining engagement, and balancing competing business priorities.

First, many participants discussed initial challenges in getting employers interested and engaged with TPM, and indicated that competing business priorities, workforce development initiative fatigue, and perceived complexity of the TPM approach often make initial value proposition discussions with business more difficult. In many cases, engagement challenges have boiled down to shifting industry mindsets not just about how they source talent, but how their organizations view ongoing talent development and their role in that process. One workforce development consultant in the focus group referred to the mindset regional employers have, particularly those who have high turnover and skill shortages, by saying that "Employers here often view talent as a liability on a spreadsheet rather than an asset to be invested in. Many employers seek to minimize costs when it comes to talent to offset the costs of turnover, not realizing that their disinvestment in their talent is likely the source of their talent problems." Another participant, a workforce leader in the garment and fashion manufacturing industry, indicated that the "muscles of investment [in talent development] have been atrophied" for many companies. Others echoed this need for a mindset shift, and indicated that it extended to the role employers have come to expect, especially from community college providers and the workforce system, which has been largely advisory and reactionary, and less strategic and involved regarding business leadership.

Many employers in Michigan, according to participants, were hesitant to commit to the process, and sustain that commitment over time. This hesitation to commit may stem from challenges in communicating how TPM can align with other existing initiatives and how it is different from previous efforts during a value proposition pitch in a way that is clear, simple, and resonates with business customers. In many instances, employers were very engaged and excited up front, but as time went on and competing priorities got in the way, the number of highly engaged employers began to dwindle. For others, it was a matter of overcoming the upfront skepticism of being in the same room and collaborating with competitors about the talent challenges they were experiencing, especially with respect to industries with a fiercely competitive labor market. Sustained focus throughout the homework strategies (Strategies 2–4) and interaction with data collection tools were mentioned

as barriers for some, though disruptions due to COVID-19 certainly played a role in sustained involvement, particularly for industries experiencing either decline or intense, rapid growth as a result of the pandemic.

Finally, competing business priorities were continually mentioned as an impediment to launching employer collaboratives. Many companies responded that their focus was crisis intervention, workplace redesign, health and safety concerns, remote work strategies, and workforce re-engagement strategies in the wake of the pandemic. In addition, new business and community focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as engaging opportunity populations often took precedence in 2020, the same year that many collaboratives were launching and/or moving into the data collection and analysis phase.

# 2) Staffing and Funding Resource Constraints

Resource constraints were also a barrier for a quarter of survey respondents, but nearly every focus group participant discussed how resources were a challenge for their collaboratives in some capacity. Resources constraints were discussed with regard to both host organization and employer staffing capacity, and host organization and employer funding support.

While some workforce development leaders mentioned that funding is often not the first barrier—as they are able to creatively braid funding streams for sector-based work and business services priorities—time, funding, and capacity to train and further develop staff to lead these efforts can be more challenging. Others mentioned the need for ongoing funding support to seed and sustain employer collaborative activities, especially to support a staffing model that dedicates an individual solely to TPM activities. With respect to economic development and chamber of commerce leaders, participants mentioned that while some organizations of this type were funding staff to serve as host organization facilitators, it is less likely thus far in Michigan for these organizations to prioritize funding in support of talent development activities. Though not universal across the state, focus group conversations concentrated in part on a gap in some regions between which organizations may have resources and ability to devote staff (typically workforce development) and those that have direct, trusting relationships with employers not hindered by other required workforce development duties. While these challenges are not the case in every region, it supports the approach Michigan has taken in training multiple partners within a region to support capacity, regional socialization and implementation of the TPM methodology, and a united approach to serving industry.

From a collaborative staffing standpoint, while all Michigan collaboratives discussed have a designated project manager (PM), there were several instances where these individuals were stretched thin, responsible for covering multiple collaboratives or regions at the same time, or had significant duties beyond implementing TPM collaboratives. It was clear from participants that dedicated staff time and expertise was critical to launching and maintaining collaborative progress

and impact. Where collaboratives had dedicated staff or consultants primarily responsible for TPM implementation and industry collaboration—as with West Michigan Works' collaboratives, the Michigan Energy Workforce Development Consortium, a Southwest Michigan collaborative, and others—performance and progress are at a distinct advantage. As discussed further in the subsequent section, competing priorities in state and regional efforts often pull focus from host organization efforts. In addition, as knowledgeable, TPM-trained, and passionate practitioners leave their roles for promotions and new opportunities, that passion and commitment is not always maintained, even if their organization remains supportive. There were also instances where a PM left their role, requiring the collaborative to pause operations while a new one was hired and momentum to slow as the groups attempted to bring a new PM up to speed.

The root of employer staffing and funding resource challenges stemmed largely from the time commitment needed to focus on the TPM process, not just for collaborative meetings but for the time taken away from productive work for the company. One member of the focus groups highlighted the fact that it can cost an employer thousands, if not tens of thousands of dollars in some instances, to fulfill their staff-time commitments to TPM (e.g. time to collect and clean up data, fill out surveys, attend meetings, collect and share data). This commitment of staff time, especially of late, might also conflict with differing business priorities in response to COVID-19; diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; and others, as previously discussed. Participants discussed employer caution with both time commitment and intensity of the process, with one respondent citing resistance from some regional manufacturers being tied to the "binge and purge nature of manufacturing" cycles and the risk involved in investment in talent development strategies.

These concerns, as participants discussed, have made it difficult for employers to justify and commit both time and financial investment in collaborative activities, especially if it is perceived that return on investment in the form of talent retention and recruitment cost savings are long-term realities. Discussions of further need for in-kind support and incentives to providers may lead to additional hesitation on behalf of employers to commit to TPM in Michigan, especially as they respond to COVID-19's economic, safety, and workplace impacts. Staffing capacity and priorities, and turnover of employer champion contacts were discussed as barriers to momentum in Michigan as well, especially with respect to businesses stretched thin by their participation in multiple workforce efforts or in their staffing due to COVID-19 related reductions in force. For others, ongoing, crucial short-term or immediate talent needs may have taken precedence over joining a new collaborative or employing a new approach, regardless of messaging the potential of TPM in solving both short- and long-term challenges.

# 3) Conflict with Existing Partners and Workforce Efforts

Conflict with partners was not as pertinent a challenge with members of the focus groups as employer engagement or resource constraints, but it was a barrier several brought out in conversation. Largely, any conflict in priorities and partner alignment stemmed from competing workforce approaches or perceived duplication of services. Michigan participants discussed the challenges of aligning the valuable "mission-driven and data-directed" work of TPM with competing priorities and longer-standing models like traditional sector strategy approaches, required business resource networks, and Business Solutions Professional training and roles. With a requirement to have businesses at the table for workforce development boards, chamber and economic development activity, business resource networks (that address retention and barrier removal), and regional Career Education Advisory Councils, among other responsibilities, a challenge exists in alignment of competing business and government priorities. In addition, and as previously mentioned, current business and community focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as the Flint Water Crisis, and other state-specific challenges related to the pandemic, all contributed to strain on implementation of the TPM methodology, despite intentions and interest.

With respect to working with education and training providers, there was one notable differentiator between groups in terms of when and how they engaged training and education providers, and each came with their own set of pros and cons. In one instance, a collaborative engaged an education provider only after defining skill needs and conducting demand planning—as the TPM strategy progression in its pure form might suggest—but never looped them into what was happening with the collaborative until that late stage. Once engaged, the education provider brought to light a number of issues that needed to be addressed including curriculum development, credential requirements, staffing, and class size limitations, among others. This created a stall point for the collaborative because they had to work backwards to realign their timelines with the education provider and to think through how their school's resource constraints would be addressed.

In other instances, collaboratives struggled to rope in a number of postsecondary education providers because the school's plans for providing certain degree programs did not align with the plans and ideals of the collaborative. This made it challenging for the collaborative to lock in a preferred education partner to provide certain skills training programs.

# Michigan's Leading Success Factors

As part of the focus group's discussion about challenges, the conversation revealed a number of key techniques that helped collaboratives overcome them. Despite challenges and some concern over the methodology's complexity, discussion clearly illuminated support for the TPM methodology, the importance of and adherence to demand-driven strategies to serve industry, and value of the TPM strategies to advance talent pipeline goals. Three strategies surfaced as most important to the success of TPM in Michigan, including simplifying the TPM process when working with employers; engaging partners early and often; and aligning or building on existing initiatives or industry collaboratives.

## 1) Simplifying and Slowing Down the TPM Process

To make TPM more accessible to and sustainable for employers, several focus group members discussed efforts to simplify the process, step-by-step, as much as possible. By breaking down individual strategies into smaller, more digestible chunks, collaboratives are best able to maintain focus, prioritize salient tasks, accomplish their strategic goals, and gain momentum. Participants discussed a slower ramp up to socialize partners, employers, key leadership, and important stakeholders ("Strategy 0" or the TPM Orientation) as crucial to the launch and overall success of a collaborative. Several participants discussed avoiding leaning too heavily into theory and process with employers in favor of doing TPM without overwhelming employers at the outset with complex strategy discussion.

Focus group participants also discussed the need to take their time completing each strategy, and moving employers and partners along in lock step with one another, even if it takes more time to do so. By moving employers and partners along the process together as each of these steps are taken, successful collaboratives were able to help employers keep one another accountable, feel less overwhelmed by the process, gain a sense of progress and accomplishment, and also stay more

engaged. While this raised some concerns about employer's short-term needs and may have even prolonged the process further, it ultimately helped many collaboratives accomplish their goals more effectively, as well as identify and address the proper talent challenges they were experiencing. Several participants also mentioned the need for individualized support to employer collaborative members in gathering data and completing the surveys associated with Strategies 2–4.

## 2) Engaging Employers and Partners Early and Often

To prevent or minimize the risk of turning employers or partners off from the TPM process, successful collaboratives in Michigan engaged employers and partners as early and as much as possible at the outset of forming the collaborative. Many tapped experienced practitioners and business champions to socialize their communities, partners, and prospective employers to the TPM process.

In the case of employers, this emphasis on frequent engagement helped to clarify any confusion about the program, distinguish it from or align it with other efforts, and set clear expectations from the very beginning regarding employer commitment and the support needed from various employer contacts. It also gave the collaborative's leaders an opportunity to tell success stories and demonstrate the type of return on investment employers should expect to get based on success stories from the Michigan TPM practitioner network and other National Learning Network members. Leveraging employer champions as part of this process was consistently mentioned as a key strategy for obtaining employer buy-in. Consumers Energy and DTE Energy have played key roles in promoting the use of TPM for talent pipeline needs statewide. Regionally, employer partners like Mercy Health have promoted replication of the TPM model in various Michigan regions where they have healthcare talent needs. In Southeast Michigan, a major chemical company has advocated for other regional chemical companies to employ TPM to solve their industry's recruitment and talent management challenges.

In addition, participants discussed the importance of getting the right executive leadership/sponsorship in place to support company participation, and the importance of intentionality in staff involved in collaborative meetings, data collection, and other TPM activities. Having the right people at the table, which may differ across industries and various employer sizes and staffing capacities, was identified as a crucial component from launch through strategy implementation.

In the case of education or training partners, engaging early and often gave partners insight into the types of skills employers needed, but they could also help the collaborative align timelines with theirs in a way that helped both parties achieve their goals. For instance, one collaborative brought in a vocational education provider to the discussion from the very earliest days of organizing; inviting them to meetings or providing meeting summaries to help keep them informed, even when the provider was not contributing to the advancement of the collaborative at that point. In this scenario, the education provider was excited and ready to provide what the employers needed because they were kept aware of the collaborative's progress and could help the collaborative align its timeline with theirs in order to develop a new program in a timely manner.

## 3) Aligning or Building On Existing Initiatives or Industry Collaboratives

Participants discussed the many strong workforce development and management approaches that exist in the state to serve business and industry customers. Many of these approaches, it was discussed, align well with TPM, and have been leveraged to advance TPM strategies to the benefit of regional pipeline goals. With the existence of many other workforce development programs and approaches that rely on industry voice and employer collaboration, many Michigan TPM collaboratives have either build on existing relationships and industry councils, or aligned multiple approaches to maximize employer commitment and passion for solving workforce challenges. According to the survey, half of respondents who have led or supported a TPM collaborative had existing employer collaboratives prior to using TPM.

For instance, several collaboratives leveraged a handful of employers that had trusting and productive collaborations already, and the TPM methodology could be applied to enhance data collection and inform decisions as employers worked with education and training institutions. Separately, if there were employers and training providers that had existing relationships or programs, they were also brought in to set the foundation for the collaborative so that other employers would see that a collaborative model could work for them, too.

Michigan collaboratives have been aligned with various efforts, including the following:

- **Existing sector partnerships and industry councils, including the statewide Michigan Industry Cluster Approach**

- **Business Services Professional training and business services teams within Michigan Works! Agencies**

- **Regional Business Resource Networks, which provide employers an opportunity to access shared retention and barrier removal services**

- **Apprenticeship and work-based learning strategies, which rely on industry engagement to develop programs**

- **A growing movement of industry-led MiCareerQuest career inspiration events**

- **Regional Career Education Advisory Councils**

**Despite challenges and some concern over the methodology's complexity, discussion clearly illuminated support for the TPM methodology, the importance of and adherence to demand-driven strategies to serve industry, and value of the TPM strategies to advance talent pipeline goals.**

# Kentucky: Leadership Prompts Comprehensive Collaboration

## Background

**Kentucky, an early-adopter of the TPM framework, has been enthusiastic about TPM since its inception with significant support from the business community and state government officials. In 2017, Beth Davisson, executive director of the state chamber's Workforce Center, participated in the second TPM Academy cohort and returned to Kentucky to spearhead TPM's expansion.**

Recognizing the importance of local buy-in to TPM, the Kentucky Chamber hosted a series of town halls and forums across the Commonwealth to spread awareness of the methodology. Davisson conducted many of these town halls herself, traveling to 40 different locations within three months. The success of these meetings was largely due to collaboration with local chambers of commerce and other reputable partners to bring together the right stakeholders such as community leaders, government officials, industry leaders, economic development agency representatives, and education partners.

As interest in TPM grew throughout the state, the need for a dedicated team of workforce practitioners to support these efforts became apparent. Davisson built a team of TPM project managers (PM) who would each herald TPM efforts in their respective regions—as well as a staff member dedicated to the equine industry—with support from a statewide TPM system-leader. Though the Kentucky Chamber PMs would oversee employer collaboratives, having employer and education champions who understood the TPM methodology would expedite and improve their efforts. Hosting a TPM Academy of Kentucky would accomplish the cultivation of these leaders. Out of over 215 applications, 39 local leaders from across the state were selected to participate and play these important champion roles. Participants included those from every stage of the workforce development process including leaders from local chambers of commerce, education, economic and workforce development, and business.

An additional TPM Academy was hosted in partnership with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System in summer 2020 to provide educators a more comprehensive understanding of TPM's objectives so that current and future efforts could progress more effectively and efficiently. In addition, TPM was integrated into the vision for the Kentucky Chamber Workforce Center Board of Managers, a group of employer leaders that guides the decisions for statewide strategy and brings key employers and stakeholders to the table.

To date, Kentucky has stood up 28 active TPM collaboratives engaging more than 200 employers across the Commonwealth that address all five of Kentucky's key sectors (construction, business services, healthcare, manufacturing, and transportation and logistics) and the equine industry. They have conducted demand planning for 144 critical jobs and are focused on developing solutions for 57 of these positions utilizing the TPM process.

## Kentucky State Survey

To better understand Kentucky's approach to TPM along with the challenges and opportunities of statewide implementation, a survey was sent to all TPM Academy of Kentucky participants from both the first cohort in 2018 and the second education-specific cohort in 2020. A total of 18 participants from geographically diverse backgrounds provided feedback resulting in a 23% response rate. Over half (55%) of survey respondents represented educational institutions. Members from chamber or business associations, employers, and economic development agencies equally split the remaining 45% of participants.
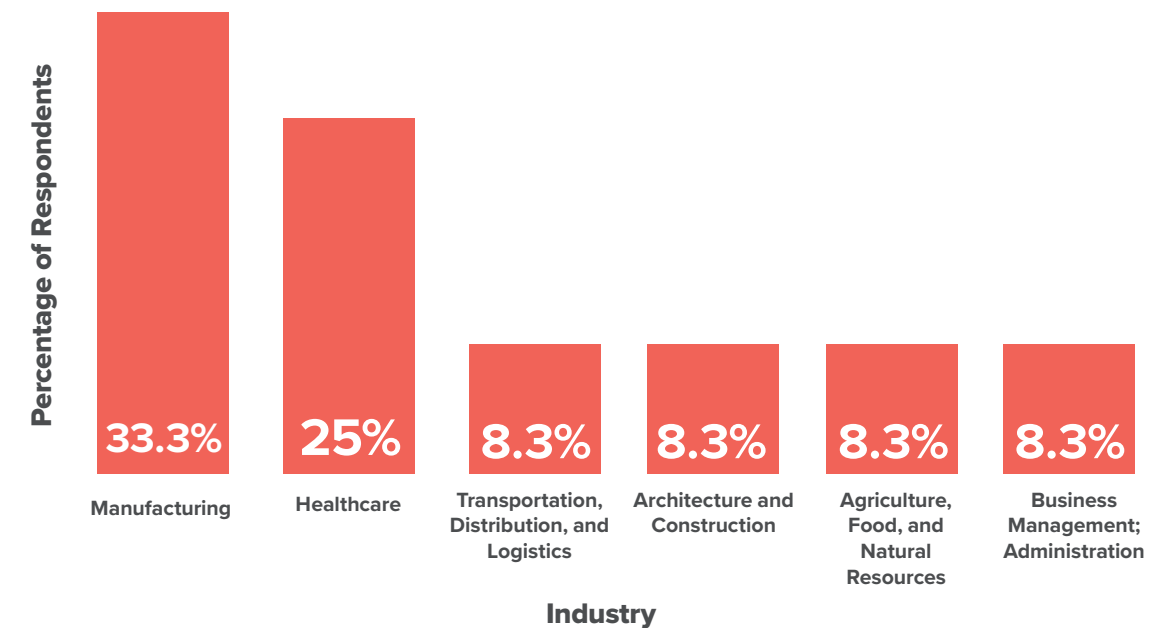
**Kentucky has stood up 28 active TPM collaboratives engaging more than 200 employers across the Commonwealth**

**Figure 10: Employer Collaboratives Created Since Academy Participation**



**Figure 11: Industries Represented by Employer Collaboratives**
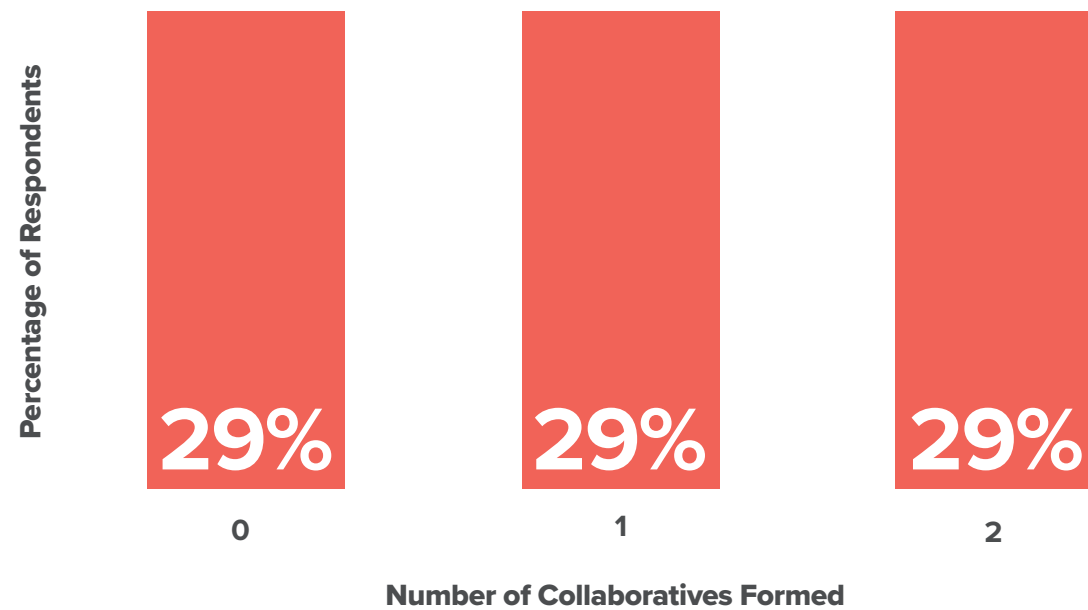


As shown in **Figure 10**, nearly 60% of survey respondents reported starting or supporting a collaborative since attending the TPM Academy, with equal numbers indicating starting one and three collaboratives. The intent of the TPM Academy of Kentucky was to provide an opportunity to develop key leaders across the state that could support and guide the work of employer collaboratives while the staff of the Kentucky Chamber Workforce Center would maintain responsibility for day-to-day employer collaborative operations. The results of the survey are in line with the Kentucky approach.

Respondents also represent various viewpoints of the TPM value chain, from organizing the collaboratives to representing partnering organizations. **Figure 11** shows which industries have active employer collaboratives based on the survey. As stated previously, all five of Kentucky's self-identified key sectors are included and one collaborative represents the equine industry, another critically important sector to Kentucky that has been built into their statewide approach. About half of the active collaboratives have completed the data collection and analysis components of the TPM framework which includes demand planning, understanding core competencies, and analyzing talent flows (Strategies 2–4). Finally, almost three-quarters of them had pre-existing frameworks for organizing different stakeholders.

**Respondents also represent various viewpoints of the TPM value chain, from organizing the collaboratives to representing partnering organizations.**

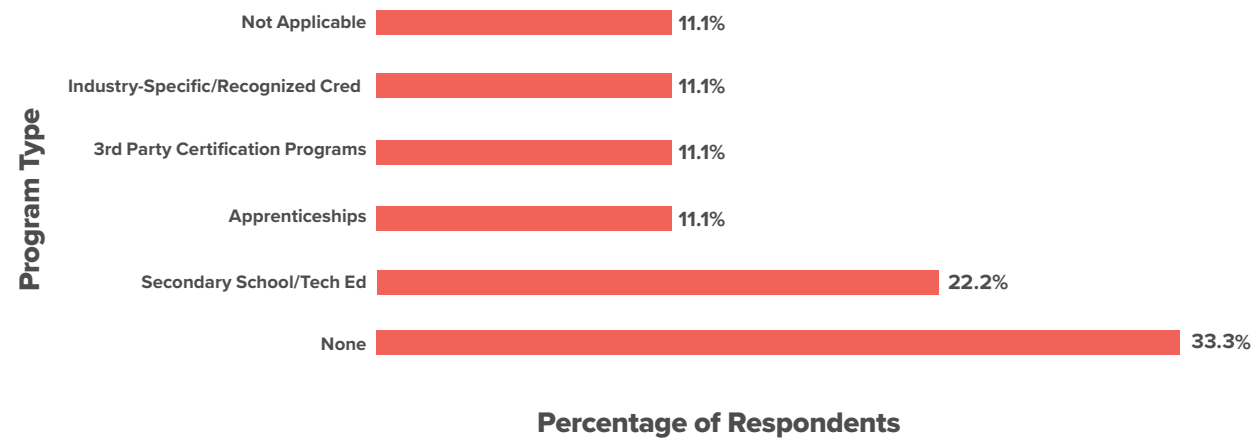**Figure 12: Education and Training Program Creation or Adjustment by Collaborative**



Percentage of Respondents

- Not Applicable — 11.1%
- Industry-Specific/Recognized Cred — 11.1%
- 3rd Party Certification Programs — 11.1%
- Apprenticeships — 11.1%
- Secondary School/Tech Ed — 22.2%
- None — 33.3%

*Program Type*

*Percentage of Respondents*

**Figure 12** highlights what changes have been made since adopting TPM, with more than a quarter of respondents selecting modifications to secondary school and/or technical education curriculum. This response is not surprising with a majority of respondents representing educational institutions. It also highlights an advantage of bringing partners under the TPM umbrella through an orientation: by working together at this early stage of TPM implementation, employers and partners begin organizing around the same principles. Industry-specific credentials, third-party certificate programs, and apprenticeships make up the other changes. The remaining third of survey respondents indicated that they have not developed or adjusted any education or training programs, having not yet reached Strategy 5.

## Kentucky Focus Group Discussions

To complement the data collected from the Kentucky survey, a small focus group was held with four key stakeholders in September 2020. Participants included an electrical company CEO, a Kentucky Chamber Foundation employee, a local workforce board employee, and a director of workforce services for a technical college. Additionally, the Kentucky Chamber Workforce Center recently released a two-year report, *Building Kentucky's Talent Pipeline,* which provided supplementary content for the analysis detailed in the subsequent sections of this report.

**The focus groups that were convened included four key stakeholder groups within the state of Kentucky.**
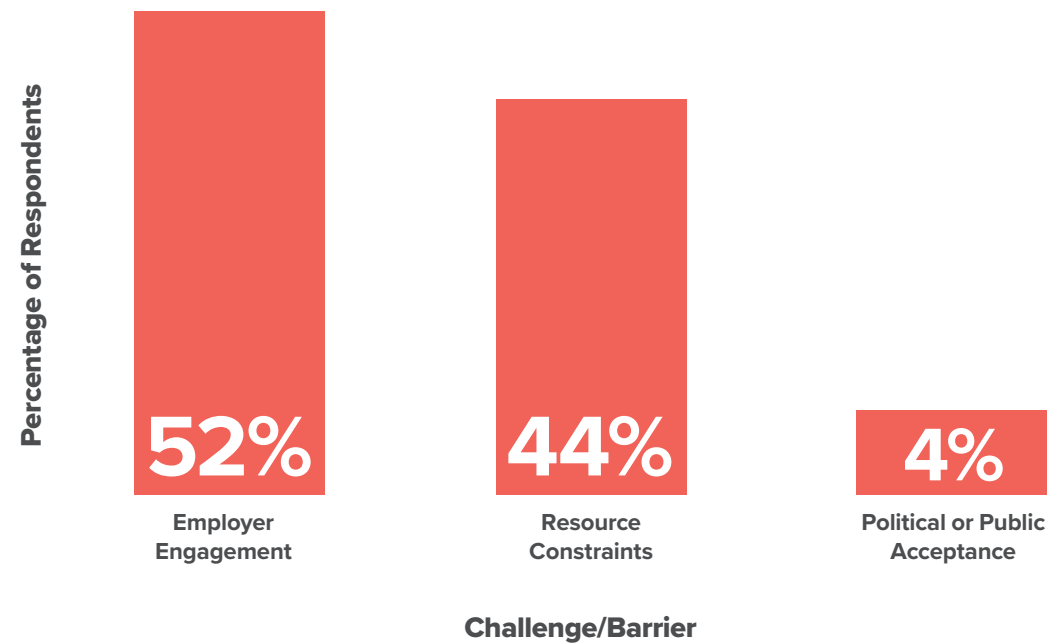
**Nearly**

**60%**

**of respondents reported starting or supporting a collaborative since attending the TPM Academy**

# Kentucky's Leading Challenges

With every success story there are lessons to be learned. The same applies to Kentucky in their implementation strategy. Survey respondents were asked to identify their greatest barriers to launching a collaborative and overall ability to implement TPM (see **Figure 13**). Over half of respondents indicated employer engagement was a major challenge, while 44% believed that resource constraints were an impediment to sustaining an employer collaborative. Both of those problems were cited by focus group participants—along with employee churn on the part of employer partners engaged in TPM—and will be expanded subsequently.

**Figure 13: Barriers to Collaborative Launch and Implementation**



Percentage of Respondents

**52%**
Employer
Engagement

**44%**
Resource
Constraints

**4%**
Political or Public
Acceptance

**Challenge/Barrier**

One important lesson learned is that not all communities are ready for TPM. While many were ready and willing to adopt the new approach to building a business-aligned workforce, not all had the capacity, community support, or desire to launch this type of project. This can be a hurdle but also helpful in prioritizing communities that are poised for this work and building relationships with leaders when communities are ready to adopt this style of workforce development.

## 1) Employer Engagement

Employer engagement challenges looked slightly different for each focus group participant. One focus group participant, a CEO of an electrical company out of Frankfurt, KY, described how electrical companies in his region usually found new employees by poaching them from rival companies. Recognizing this was unsustainable and caused shortages in services supplied, companies in the region were eager to test a new approach and form an employer collaborative.

The CEO believed that the group should focus on just electricians, a smaller segment in the wide subfield of skilled trades that employers in his region employed. After the initial meeting, several employers decided to drop out because they thought the investment would not be worth the reward or wanted to focus on multiple jobs rooted in the larger construction portfolio. However many insights came from the time spent on focusing on one critical job as a starting point. First, the collaborative's assumption about poaching as a primary sourcing tactic was confirmed during their talent flow analysis which uncovered that 55% of their hires were coming from within the industry. Second, they were able to identify where many of their current electricians were entering the industry from: high school CTE programs.

Even though the remaining group members were enthusiastic about what they uncovered as a result of targeting electricians, a larger critical mass could have garnered more influence on the front-end of the process.

The community and technical college representative from Eastern Kentucky described the demand planning process as the largest barrier to support one of her associated collaboratives. Initially, eight or nine employers expressed interest in creating a group, but only about half of those at the first meeting completed the demand planning survey. This challenge was not unique to this specific situation, as many employers cite enthusiasm for the program but are hesitant to exchange proprietary information.

Another challenge was that human resources managers, the ones frequently tasked with completing the survey, do not have the necessary time to make filling out the surveys a priority. For smaller employers that do not have a formal process (e.g., applicant tracking systems, human resource information systems) for collecting, organizing, and maintaining the type of data necessary for demand planning, hiring requirements, and talent flow analysis, this can be a time-consuming task in collecting the information necessary to complete the surveys. For larger companies, it may require parsing out the right information from the system for hundreds of employees.

## 2) Resource Constraints

An inventory of available resources and those missing is critical to successful implementation and sustainability. Resource constraints were acknowledged as a barrier to successful implementation by 44% of the survey respondents and at least two of the focus group participants. These varied from financial shortfalls to non-financial factors, such as time and staffing capacity. Lack of capacity was noted as a challenge across all stakeholders: on part of the host organization, the employer collaborative members, and the education partners.

**The same focus group participant whose collaborative selected electricians as their critical job described how, after identifying problems that stemmed from building a stable base of electricians, the collaborative sought to work with a local school system that had vocational programs. However, the county had eliminated its electrical training program almost a decade earlier. In order to resurface this program with a dedicated electricians pathway, they would need significant financial resources and, to date, the school system has not shown interest in moving forward.**

A community and technical college representative in Eastern Kentucky had a slightly different view of resource challenges. Facing a specialized nursing shortage, the region found it difficult to staff its healthcare needs. The problem was not graduating enough registered nurses, it was keeping them in the region. The retention rate for nurses was unsustainable. To remedy this, the collaborative decided to develop an apprenticeship program for current healthcare employees who were not nurses but employed in the region. However, the apprenticeship program was stalled because the community and technical college could not find funds to hire additional faculty (or increase the workload of current instructors). Without increased funding, the apprenticeship program would never get off the ground. The workforce board eventually agreed to fund participants once the program was implemented.

The workforce financing structure is complex at the very best, including over $1.1 billion invested throughout the Commonwealth. A handful of employer collaboratives throughout the state noted a need for better awareness of existing resources and how to access them. Understanding what financial resources exist for employers from local, state, and federal workforce programs as well as nonprofit organizations can be useful in developing a financial plan for supporting and implementing solutions as they come about. The Kentucky Workforce Center has developed a map of financial resources and has worked to educate employer collaboratives on different funding models and opportunities available to them. However, the ability to access some resources would require policy changes.

Lack of capacity on behalf of all stakeholders was also a resource constraint. This has been especially challenging in light of the pandemic, as many partners and employers have shifted their focus to the immediate needs of their businesses and not their longer-term goals. Across the state, many collaboratives have put their work on hold until their partners and employers can prioritize TPM again.

## 3) Employee Churn

Another common thread throughout the focus group discussion is the importance of having somebody enthusiastic about TPM to serve as the company's representative in the employer collaborative, regardless of whether that person went through an orientation or bought into the process through the collaborative. A workforce board employee in Western Kentucky mentioned that some employers would shift in and out of the collaborative, making it difficult for collaborative members to be on the same page. In addition, one of the leaders for the collaborative lived a couple hours away from the central location, creating delays in scheduling in-person meetings.

One participant cited the need for consistency in who attends from relevant groups. If an employer sends a human resources representative for the first meeting, it is helpful if that person continues to attend future meetings. If participating companies send a new person each time, it tends to slow down meetings, causing frustration across the collaborative.

# 52%

## of respondents cited employer engagement as a major challenge

# Kentucky's Leading Success Factors

In the discussion about challenges in focus groups, the conversation revealed a number of key techniques that helped collaboratives overcome them. Though there have been challenges associated with employer engagement and resource constraints, focus group participants were eager TPM supporters. Three strategies surfaced as most important to the success of TPM in Kentucky, which include comprehensive and enthusiastic support from chambers of commerce; the flexibility of the TPM framework; and prioritizing quicks wins to gain buy-in and momentum.

## 1) Strong Support from Chambers of Commerce

As mentioned previously, Kentucky fully embraced the TPM model at the state level, leading to enthusiasm from local chambers of commerce across the Commonwealth. Solid and unified support from key stakeholders at a statewide level, like the state chamber and the Cabinet for Education and Workforce, provided significant trust in the TPM framework for those establishing and sustaining employer collaboratives. In addition to the name recognition and buy-in from both state and local leadership, having a dedicated PM to shepherd the collaborative's work forward was seen as an incredible tool for all focus group participants.

One focus group participant felt comfortable navigating the political or bureaucratic barricades but cited the designated chamber when she needed additional support for the collaborative's request of the education partners. This particular PM previously worked in the education system, and was able to lean into that experience to help the collaborative meet with education providers. Due to this understanding of both employer and educator perspectives and needs, as well as the ability to communicate a strong value proposition, the collaborative and local education system were able to agree to work together in revamping existing programs to meet the demands of the construction industry.

Another participant who serves as a Kentucky Chamber PM and has developed several collaboratives across different sectors noted that both the local chambers and her colleagues at the state chamber served as a sounding board and support when issues would arise, particularly as she transitioned into her new role. She more quickly gained credibility and a solid footing to develop relationships in those regions due to her local chamber partners introducing her to regional employers, educators, and other partners.

## 2) Flexibility of TPM Framework

An additional factor that has led to Kentucky's success was the flexibility of the TPM framework. TPM provides a structured but agile process for practitioners and employer collaboratives to work within. The detailed components can be done in sequence, particularly for new initiatives or based on meeting the employers where they are. Oftentimes, practitioners find themselves leaning on activities and partnerships from previous efforts (i.e. when a large regional employer has already engaged with a community college). Thus, some participants choose to start from the first strategy that is focused on forming a collaborative while others begin with later strategies such as identifying core competencies.

An example of the flexibility of the framework played out in the Bluegrass construction collaborative where they embraced the idea that the strategies could be reordered to best suit their needs. After forming the collaborative (Strategy 1), they opted to complete their talent flow analysis (Strategy 4) next. The talent flow analysis, analyzing hires that took place between August 2015 to August 2018, yielded many insights. The first insight was that 55% of their hires during this period came from within their industry. The second insight was that of the hires during this period, 48% of hires were coming to them directly from the high school level. Further examination of those high school hires led to the insight that nearly 50% of those came to them after receiving training/education in five counties. The collaborative then opted to begin partnering with one recognized preferred provider, Southside Technical Center. They recognized that historically, Southside students become excellent employees, but they do not get enough of these great students from the program. Their solution? To develop a plan of greater involvement with Southside and its students on an ongoing basis, but first, they needed to communicate their needs.

The collaborative then stepped back to complete their needs assessment (Strategies 2 and 3). The assessment included completing demand projections from September 2018 to October 2020 as well as evaluating the competency and credential requirements for the position. Upon completion of the needs assessment, not only were they able to clearly communicate exactly which technical and soft skills were most important for someone to be successful in this position, but also that over the next two years, they would need to hire 273 commercial electricians. The employer champion from Frankfurt that participated in the focus group cited that the ability to start later in the process was important to sustaining employer engagement. The employers in the region had done some of this work already and wanted to see some short-term wins and insights based on their initial assumptions before buying into other components of the overall TPM strategy.

Leaning into this flexibility can be valuable when building on an existing initiative. It is also worth recognizing that a strategy may need to be revisited in order to ensure the right data is being collected for the collaborative to be able to move forward. The Western Kentucky healthcare collaborative was originally joined with long-term healthcare and personal care companies. During the first round of demand planning for general nursing, it was determined that the groups should separate and focus on specialty nursing needs. From those results, the employers decided to focus on the specialty categories of Telemetry, Critical Care, and Surgical RNs and a second round of demand planning was performed. Although the demand numbers for specialty nursing were relatively small, they were able to determine the exact needs, identify critical skills in demand, and dig into retention and turnover. The long-term healthcare collaborative was also able to determine their three critical jobs and complete demand planning for personal care aides, certified nursing assistants, and certified medical aides. The group now has a vision to build a career pathway to integrate into specialty nursing.

Due to COVID-19 it is likely that both groups will have to revisit their needs assessment data including demand planning (Strategy 2) and reviewing job descriptions and hiring requirements (Strategy 3). This is not unique to the healthcare industry and plays into the strength of the framework's flexibility. Once a collaborative is established, the activities associated with each strategy can be revisited in any order to meet the needs of the collaborative, move forward in their work, and answer any new questions that surfaced.

## 3) Prioritization of Quick Win Objectives

Finally, successful collaboratives focused on identifying smaller, concrete goals that can be achieved in the short term in order to gain long-term momentum. The TPM framework emphasizes this during Strategy 1 and more completely in Strategy 5, but it can often be forgotten when enthusiastic and determined community and business leaders come together to plan their efforts. It is important to note that the TPM framework is not necessarily meant to address discrete or short-term workforce challenges; but to address system-wide, long-term changes in how we hire, retain, and retrain our employees and how we communicate our requirements for our most in-demand jobs to our education and training partners in the community.

That being said, embedding quick wins or short-term goals into a long-term strategy can greatly increase the efficacy of an initiative by showing results that lead to more buy-in of key stakeholders and sustained employer engagement. These quick wins could be collection of data that supports the assumptions of the collaborative in relation to their pain points, establishment of a particular partnership, or rework of an existing program to meet an immediate need that is part of a larger challenge. A Strategy 1 activity is assessing four key components of an employer collaborative's readiness to take on a specific workforce challenge when determining their focus: urgency,

willingness/capacity, shared need, and potential return on investment. This approach can be useful in helping an employer collaborative or a host organization assess whether there are opportunities to capture any quick wins early in the process that may advance the collaborative's long-term goals.

During the focus group, participants acknowledged the challenges they experienced as part of the TPM process. They were able to accept what they knew could not be changed in the short-term and planned around those obstacles as long-term components to their workforce strategy. Within the construction collaborative, the CEO of the electrical company realized that establishing a formal electrical program at the secondary school level was not feasible due to a lack of resources; however, they could work with the local school system to ensure that students get more exposure to the field. This included reworking existing coursework, particularly at the eighth-grade level where students are learning about different career opportunities. The employers also sponsored career days and "lunch and learns" at the high schools. The collaborative deemed this partnership with the local school system and increased student awareness as a short-term win while determining resources to establish more training programs to keep talent in the region.

In the Louisville region, the healthcare collaborative focused on nursing took a similar approach to generate a short-term win for the members based on the data they collected from the TPM process. The following four universal barriers to growing the number of RNs surfaced: 1) a lack of qualified faculty and clinical instructors, 2) scarcity of clinical rotation sites, 3) the demand to increase the number of students with cost being a major deterrent for many to attend, 4) student retention both in how many students graduate on time as well as how many graduates live and work in the Greater Louisville area following their education.

With these insights in mind, the educators convened (separate from the employers) to better quantify these needs and reach consensus on areas employers could work to increase the number of RNs graduating from these programs. They assembled their own needs assessment and determined that, in order to increase the RN capacity by 22% (roughly leveling supply and demand), they would need to add approximately 44 additional faculty, add roughly 126 clinical instructors, and increase the number of clinical rotation sites by approximately 101.

During this time period, the educators were also able to access data from the Kentucky Board of Nursing, which allowed a granular look into each program's capacity, applications, enrollment, graduations, and licenses. Armed with a precise understanding of both demand and supply, consensus was reached by both employers and educators to initially collaborate towards student retention as it had the highest opportunity for impact and required the least amount of resources for employers, educators, and workforce partners.

# The Key Common Challenge and Success Factor for TPM in Michigan and Kentucky

Between Michigan and Kentucky, there was one common challenge and one common success factor discussed in the focus groups.

## Common Challenge: Building and Maintaining Momentum

The key common challenge echoed by focus group participants in each session was building and sustaining momentum for the employer collaboratives. Nearly every focus group participant discussed having to grapple with getting all important stakeholders in the room at the same time just to kick start the process, never mind keeping things moving as implementation continues. In many instances, focus group participants mentioned that once partners were engaged, there was often a lot of excitement and activity up front. But as the program advanced into later stages and the work became more time- and labor-intensive for partners, activity often slowed down, resulting in disengagement by those employers and partners, and hampering the ability of the collaborative to accomplish its goals. This challenge presents a key opportunity for ongoing discussion and best practice sharing for the continued success of TPM across the National Learning Network.

## Common Success Factor: Having an Employer/Community Champion

The key common success factor was having an "employer or community champion" that takes a leadership role in the collaborative and in promoting TPM across a state or region. It has been critical to have at least one highly respected employer in the region or a high-level executive who is respected by peers inside and outside of their industry to serve as an advocate for TPM. Whether a large employer, key industry "anchor," or visible private-sector community partner, business champions are often most important to the success of TPM launch and implementation. The most successful collaboratives built their existing programs and networks around these individuals or employers because, as one TPM champion in our focus groups said best, "if the major players are doing it successfully and believe in it, the other employers and business leaders naturally follow." Frequently, this champion is more familiar with the nuts and bolts of what TPM is, and what is involved to make it happen. That way, when the common challenge of waning employer engagement comes about, there is someone to remind them of the collaborative's objective and motivate their continued participation.

## Applying Lessons Learned

Since 2014, the Chamber Foundation has learned a great deal about TPM's challenges and successes. With growing adoption and application in different industries across the country, there is still much to learn. TPM is not a silver bullet to any talent challenge. However, the framework is meant to be agile and meet a community where it is in developing and implementing lasting workforce solutions. The Chamber Foundation takes seriously its role in supporting TPM practitioners and continues to evolve its TPM Academy trainings and technical support based on field experience, changes in the economy, and new tools and resources developed to accomplish talent pipeline goals.

The revelations as a result of the National Learning Network survey, the state surveys, and the focus groups presented in this report provide the Chamber Foundation a helpful start for enhancing the existing framework to meet the needs of new or rising challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or long-standing issues such as employee churn, staffing and funding constraints, and the need for diversification in the workforce.

As stated in the introduction, TPM's defining feature is that the work of a collaborative is driven by employers who can diagnose the business problem and work towards a business solution. This cannot be accomplished without the important contributions of many partners—especially education, training, and service providers—but the success of a collaborative is truly based on employer leadership. An increasingly common trend among TPM practitioners is simplifying the process, as highlighted in the Michigan case study, to support employer collaborative members' ability to progress

through the process. As TPM Fellow Sharon Miller has shared, "Employers don't need to know how the sausage is made." In this metaphor, employers just need to supply the ingredients and it is the job of the Chamber Foundation and host organization to make that as simple as possible.

Though TPM can be complex, there are short-term wins that employer collaboratives can identify and work towards as they become more comfortable with the advanced practices, as demonstrated in the Kentucky analysis. The Chamber Foundation will continue to keep this front of mind in future curriculum enhancements and for trainings to support host organizations' ability to maintain employer momentum. As promising practices in employer engagement, process simplifications, and tools that support efficiency are identified, the Chamber Foundation remains committed to elevating them to the National Learning Network. Additionally, the Chamber Foundation has launched an industry-focused webinar series to connect TPM practitioners and employers from across the country for discussion of promising practices and collaboration to form solutions to unique industry challenges.

Additional challenges discussed in this report included the recent, but long needed, focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. With the input of TPM practitioners, nonprofit partners, and community based organizations—and the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation—the Chamber Foundation developed a new resource to demonstrate how employers and opportunity population-serving organizations (OPSOs) can leverage TPM to modify their processes in ways that make their partnerships more successful; shift employer perspectives and behavior in hiring those who experience barriers to employment; and ultimately promote greater workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Chamber Foundation intends to build on this work with additional real-life examples to demonstrate how TPM can be used to improve communication and promote shared understanding between employers and OPSOs, therefore improving outcomes for opportunity populations. Diversity, equity, and inclusion as a shared pain point will also be further expanded in the TPM Academy curriculum's updated edition (available in early 2021 with support from Walmart).

Though no one could have predicted at the beginning of 2020 the extreme toll that COVID-19 would have on almost every industry, its implications for talent will long be a challenge. In response to the pandemic, the Chamber Foundation presented to the National Learning Network a short-term response and long-term disaster recovery approach to TPM. The TPM framework was built to be agile, and can provide the tools and strategies to identify and respond to economic and labor market shifts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It is beneficial to leverage existing employer collaboratives who have established a rapport with one another to address workforce challenges when resources, both financial and non-financial, are scarce. Whereas some collaborative's focus areas for jobs and

pain points became less relevant as a result of the pandemic, some found that employer collaborative needs were more urgent than ever. The TPM National Learning Network members have also shared with one another solutions from their communities, such as cross-industry employee sharing and competency mapping for employee matching, in hopes of potential replication. The Chamber Foundation will continue to capture these examples so that more communities can benefit.

Though the Chamber Foundation will focus its attention on how to overcome challenges, it is also important to build on what has resulted in success, including setting up host organizations to successfully identify, leverage, and value its champions. The Chamber Foundation will increase its recruitment of employer champions to present to the National Learning Network on webinars and workshops. As the Chamber Foundation builds on the available case studies and testimonials, champions will be prominently featured to help other practitioners identify the characteristics needed for a strong employer champion. In addition, given the challenges presented in employee churn and how the departure of a champion can take progress off track, the Chamber Foundation will create a sustainability course module as part of its developing online learning platform. The need to simplify the external presentation of TPM will be further emphasized in the TPM Academy curriculum and training delivery, in addition to discussing ways to adapt TPM's agile concepts and framework into existing initiatives in a way that enhances them and strengthens talent pipeline approaches.

The Chamber Foundation is ready and eager to continue to grow with the National Learning Network, celebrate its successes, and collaborate to identify and devise solutions to inevitable challenges. What is most helpful is when TPM practitioners are willing to share the good and the bad with the Chamber Foundation and their fellow National Learning Network members. This enables the Chamber Foundation to narrow its focus in supporting TPM practitioners and their communities as they take on these important efforts.

*If you are a TPM practitioner interested in furthering your TPM implementation by tapping into best practices or if you have promising practices in TPM implementation to share, contact the Chamber Foundation team and share your story on our National Learning Network Slack channel.*

*If you are new to TPM and interested in employing the methodology in your region, contact the Chamber Foundation team and visit the TPM Academy website.*

*Want to share your thoughts on the challenges and successes discussed in this report? Engage with us!*

# Acknowledgments