

Promising Practice: Employer Advisory Council Hostos Community College

Hostos Community College's HPOG program, the Allied Health Career Pipeline Program, has established a Business Advisory Council for Allied Health that gives local employers a means of interacting with and benefitting from the program. Since the first session, held in February 2012, the Business Advisory Council for Allied Health has met once every three or four months.

Originally the council consisted of four employers: Acacia Network/Casa Promesa, DaVita Dialysis Center, Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, and Lincoln Medical and Mental Health Center. These employers became interested in Hostos' HPOG grant in various ways, including through the college's president, Dr. Felix V. Matos Rodriguez. This high-level interest in the program was further demonstrated by Dr. Matos Rodriguez's attendance at the initial Business Advisory Council session. This "kickoff" meeting allowed both the college president and HPOG project director Deborah E. Reid to demonstrate the college's commitment to the program and present the goals of the grant and the ways in which the program's students "graduate" work-ready. As a result, the employers discussed critical skill needs they would like to see addressed by the program's training, which Ms. Reid agreed to pass on to the Hostos instructors.

Rather than simply bring employers together without a clear purpose, Ms. Reid makes sure that all employers at the table understand that working with the HPOG program will benefit them. Employers are encouraged to speak frankly about the skill or knowledge gaps they identify in their workplaces, and Ms. Reid offers ways that the program can address these needs. She also ensures that employers understand that engaging with the program can include a wide range of activities, from simply sharing information on workplace challenges to providing guest speakers and hiring program graduates. This allows employers to feel comfortable collaborating with the program and gives the program a number of employer relationships which can be leveraged and strengthened over time.

For other HPOG programs looking to establish an employer advisory council, Ms. Reid recommends working with employers who can provide clinical rotations or internships, are interested in reviewing program training curricula, or can provide employment opportunities to students. Programs should be open to working with employers in whatever ways the latter are willing. Ms. Reid cautions against "keeping secret" the HPOG program's goals and recommends that the number of students targeted for employment be shared with the advisory council, as many employers will be more willing to work with the program to achieve a specific outcome. Finally, leave time at the end of each advisory council session for employers to network. This allows council members to identify ways they can help one another as well as the HPOG program.

Hostos' Business Advisory Council for Allied Health has resulted in clinical rotations and internship opportunities, job leads, the development of job shadowing programs, and employer input on training curricula. The number of employers on the council has increased since its

launch, and its future sessions will focus on opportunities for incumbent worker training as well as the possible use of employer facilities for training.