EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT MATURITY MODEL

As part of REDF's ongoing support for Employment Social Enterprises (ESEs), we've developed this draft Employer Engagement Maturity Model to help organizations assess and strengthen how they build and sustain relationships with employers. This model draws from insights shared in co-learning sessions, interviews with ESE leaders, and emerging practices from the field.

This tool is designed to help ESEs reflect on their current employer engagement practices, identify areas for growth and investment, and inform future REDF capacity building efforts.

The model is organized around three core components of employer engagement (more details on these in the Appendix):
1. **Employer Prospecting** - How you identify, vet, and reach out to potential employer partners
2. **Employer Partnership Management** - How you build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with employers
3. **Organizational Infrastructure** - The internal systems, staff, and strategy that support long-term, strategic engagement

For each component, we outline what a strong practice looks like and offer a maturity continuum to help organizations assess where they currently are - from *Fundamentals/Early*, to *Foundational*, to *Growth/Mature* stages – along with what it might take to grow. The final section includes a menu of capacity building ideas to help organizations move from one maturity stage to the next.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT MATURITY CONTINUUM

Maturity Level	Definition of Employer Engagement Practice at this Stage
Fundamentals/ Early	Organization initiates employer engagement through staff relationships. Initial steps are taken to identify relevant industries and track basic placement and contact data. Basic engagement strategies may be piloted.
Foundational	Organization uses a defined prospecting strategy and basic employer vetting criteria. Employers are segmented by relationship type, and engagement includes structured activities. A CRM or structured system supports tracking of placements and outcomes. Employer engagement staff roles and SOPs are defined.
Growth/ Mature	Organization executes a comprehensive, strategic employer engagement model. Employers are vetted using a formal rubric, segmented by strategic value, and actively engaged in training co-design. Structured post-placement support for participants and employers enhances participant retention and advancement. There are dedicated full-time staff focused on employer engagement. CRM and data systems tracking placements and alumni outcomes are used to support continuous improvement and strategic decision making. Employer engagement is embedded in organizational culture and contributes to ecosystem-level impact.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE AT DIFFERENT MATURITIES

	Organization Employer Engagement Practices	Supporting infrastructure (Staff, Processes & Tech)
Fundamentals/ Early	• Org is supporting participant placements through informal or pre-existing staff/employer relationships. Additional employer champions may not be required. • Org is aligning outreach with participant interests • Org is beginning to identify industries and/or career pathways for participant placement • Org is doing basic employer partner tracking • Org is piloting employer engagement strategies such as site visits, volunteer days, or mock interviews.	• **Basic staff guideline**: One staff, likely the Executive Director, dedicates part-time attention to employer engagement • Employer contacts & placements are tracked via simple spreadsheets • Basic drafts of email outreach
Foundational	In addition to the above – • Org is using a defined employer prospecting strategy to guide outreach • Org is applying basic employer vetting criteria to identify quality partners • Org is segmenting employers by relationship type (e.g. repeat, opportunistic, industry-aligned) • Org is regularly engaging employers through structured, sophisticated activities such as advisory councils • Org is incorporating employer feedback into training and participant preparation • Org is cultivating employer champions at multiple levels (hiring manager, employer managers, etc.) with ESE staff consistently in direct contact with employer partners	• **Basic staff guideline**: At least one staff member dedicated to employer engagement with job development as core function • CRM used to manage employer contacts, track alumni placements & outcomes • SOPs guide outreach, partner vetting, and follow up. • Basic draft of organizational pitch
Growth/ Mature	In addition to the above – • Org is using formal employer quality rubric to vet and prioritize high-potential partners • Org is segmenting employers by strategic value and tailoring engagement accordingly • Org is co-designing training with employers based on labor market needs • Org is providing structured post-placement support (both systems improvement and 1:1 management issues), to participants and employers, and regularly gathering feedback from all parties to improve outcomes	• **Basic Staff Guidelines:** Multi-person Employer Engagement team with senior leadership involved in key partnerships • CRM are fully integrated across teams and used to inform decision making • Data is reviewed regularly to improve training, placement and partnership strategies • Tailored, employer-specific organizational pitches are developed

	• Org is successfully building trust and advocating for participant placement with employers unfamiliar or hesitant to hire individuals from focus population • Org is practicing its own supportive employment practices (i.e. streamlined application process) that increase the success of participants and are replicable in a mainstream employer context, and leveraging employer partnerships to support participant advancement and influence inclusive hiring practices across workforce ecosystem • Org is cultivating champions at all levels at employer partner & establishing processes that account for inevitable turnover at employers	and used to align participant value with employer partner needs and interests.

PROJECT IDEAS: Examples of projects to advance ESE maturity in employer engagement

- Segment employers and define a target profile for strategic partnerships
- Develop an Employer Engagement Strategy to bring ESE from one maturity stage to the next
- Create job descriptions for Employer Engagement Roles (Job Developers & Career Coaches)
- Fund a part-time or FTE to pilot a dedicated employer engagement role
- Support internal coaching/training for job developers (focused on sales mindset)
- Implement a CRM system to track employer interactions and outcomes
- Evaluate which CRM system best fits organization's employer engagement and other needs
- Design a data dashboard for employer placements, retention, and advancement
- Run a labor market scan to identify high-growth occupations, aligned with participant experience & skill level and goals
- Co-design an employer advisory board/industry council
- Design employer-led workshops or mock interviews to build relationships
- Launch an alumni follow-up system to track employment stability & gather feedback
- Develop post-placement check-in protocols with participants and employers to support retention
- Develop tailored pitches and marketing materials that articulate the ESE's participant value and advocate for participant placement with prospective employers
- Support org in identifying & articulating its own supportive employment practices that both increase success of its client-employees, but are also replicable/scalable in a mainstream employer context

APPENDIX

COMPONENTS OF EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT:

1. **Employer Prospecting:** Identify, prioritize and initiate relationships with employers who align with your organization's mission and participant need
2. **Employer Partnership Management:** Build, sustain, and deepen mutually beneficial relationships with employers to support participant placement, retention, and advancement.
3. **Organizational Infrastructure:** The internal systems, staffing, processes and organizational mindset that enable long-term, strategic employer engagement and continuous improvement

A highly mature employer engagement model includes the following:
1. **Employer Prospecting**
    a. *Employer Vetting:* The organization uses a formal employer quality rubric to vet and prioritize employers that offer high-quality jobs with clear pathways to economic power.
    b. *Prospecting Strategy:* Employer targeting is driven by labor market trends, participant interests, and a clearly defined industry or career pathway strategy.
    c. *Pipeline Management:* Employer prospects are segmented into categories (e.g. anchor partners, opportunistic placements, industry pipelines, etc.) based on strategic value and relationship potential.
    d. *Outreach*: Outreach efforts are proactive and grounded in the organization's value proposition. Messaging is tailored to different employer segments, and outreach is a core job function for staff.

2. **Employer Partnership Management**
    a. *Engagement Activities:* Employer relationships are built and sustained through intentional, two-way engagement strategies such as advisory boards, volunteer engagement, site visits, and mock interviews. Employer champions across multiple levels (from frontline to Executive) are engaged.

b. *Training & Upskilling Co-Design:* Employers are embedded in the participant journey. They provide input on training content, validate credentials, and help ensure alignment with real-time labor market needs. ESEs routinely update training programs based on employer and market feedback.

c. *Post-Placement Support:* ESEs provide structured post-placement support both to alumni & employers. They collect and act on feedback to improve retention, advancement, and future participant placements.

d. *Stewardship & Feedback*: Employer relationships are segmented and actively stewarded. ESEs conduct regular check-ins, seek continuous feedback from partners, and intervene as needed to ensure success for participants and employers. Employer champions across multiple levels (from frontline to Executive) are engaged.

3. **Organizational Infrastructure**

a. *Organizational Strategy:* Employer engagement is a strategic priority, explicitly embedded in the organization's strategic plan and performance metrics.

b. *Staffing:* Dedicated staff lead employer engagement efforts with a clear focus on external relationship-building and job development. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and resourced. Staffing and systems can accommodate turnover of employer champions.

c. *Systems & Data:* A robust CRM system and structured feedback loops provide real-time visibility into employer engagement efforts, placements, alumni outcomes, and satisfaction. Data is used to refine strategy, improve services, and inform participant matching.

d. *Inclusive Employment Influence*: The organization leverages its employer partnerships to advocate for inclusive hiring practices and influence broader workforce practices.