



Ivy Tech's Employer – Driven ROI Framework

JUNE 2025 Cohort Launch

THE REGIONAL CHALLENGE:

Meeting Changing Needs

The value of workforce training is increasingly tied to the ability to measure and demonstrate what happens after the training ends. Federal and state policymakers are placing greater emphasis on data quality and transparency for employment and earnings outcomes; students want confidence that training will lead to meaningful career opportunities; and employers need to know whether their investments improve retention, productivity, and talent pipelines.

For Ivy Tech, these pressures have made return on investment (ROI) an increasingly important way to connect student outcomes, employer needs, and institutional priorities with Indiana's broader workforce goals. In [July 2026, Ivy Tech's Strategic Plan 2030: The Future of College](#) advanced these priorities and reinforced the College's focus on workforce alignment, programmatic ROI, and the sustainability of workforce-aligned programs like [Achieve Your Degree](#), [Apprenticeship](#), and [Skills Training](#). Federally, Workforce Pell sharpened the stakes further, extending aid to short-term workforce programs that can document quality and employment outcomes, meaning institutions now had a funding reason to prove non-credit program value.

At the state level, [Senate Enrolled Acts 448-2026](#) and [214-2026](#) directed Indiana to collect and publish student income data, plan a stackable credentials framework, and mandate enhanced unemployment insurance wage and employment reporting. Institutions ready before the state's 2028 program review cycle will be positioned to benefit, while those without the necessary data systems risk being measured by frameworks they are not prepared to support.

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Through this work, we learned that employers are actively seeking to inform how we design training and measure return on investment. Beyond programmatic indicators, we identified the data infrastructure and system enhancements needed to create shared evidence that serves the college, employers, and our students in meaningful ways. That alignment transforms credentials from business-informed to business-validated credentials of demonstrated value.

Molly Dodge, Senior Vice President for Workforce & Careers, Ivy Tech Community College

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AT A GLANCE

- Organization**
Ivy Tech Community College System
- Organization Type**
Community College
- Key Sector(s)**
Manufacturing
- Geographic Context**
Ivy Tech has 38 locations across Indiana
- Key Partner Organizations**
Conexus Indiana, Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center

For the College, measuring these outcomes has been particularly challenging for non-credit programs. Unlike credit-bearing programs, non-credit learners are enrolled through separate processes, tracked in systems with different standards, and, outside of the Indiana Department of Labor's Workforce Ready Grant program, largely excluded from the data agreements that make outcome reporting possible. Adding to the complexity, the process to track program outcomes requires manual outreach, which limited the ability to systematically assess impact. **In practice, the College could not systematically answer basic questions for most skills training learners: Did participants become employed? In what field? At what wage? Did the training pay off for them and for the employers who sponsored it?**



What began as separate mandates from the state, the College, and the federal government were converging on the same underlying questions, and a shared ROI framework was emerging as the potential answer for all three. The state needs evidence that workforce investments are producing economic outcomes; Ivy Tech needs to understand program effectiveness and student outcomes; and employers need to determine whether training investments are addressing workforce needs and delivering business value. A shared approach to ROI offered an opportunity to align those interests.

JULY 2025 — Initial Ecosystem Map Developed

OCT. 2025 — Organizational Capacity Constraints Encountered

THE DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH: **Measuring Return on Investment**

According to TEconomy Partners' [research](#), the demand for non-degree workforce training in Indiana is set to grow significantly over the next decade. **Over 82,000 Hoosiers are estimated to need reskilling or upskilling annually with non-degree credentials.** Ivy Tech chose to test its approach within the Manufacturing as an initial sector, with pilots focused on two new introductory courses that support five non-credit, stackable pathways: Advanced Manufacturing Principles Levels 1 and 2. These courses cover 32-40 contact hours, delivered in person or hybrid format, with embedded OSHA and MSSC certification preparation and a portfolio students can present to employers upon completion of Level 2. In addition to creating an industry-validated foundational course sequence, this exercise helped generate employer feedback early in the recruitment and training process.

The team at Ivy Tech moved through five connected stages:

- **Baseline labor market information training and data ecosystem assessment** including any needed state workforce agency data sharing agreements for non-credit skills training outcomes evaluation;
- **Development of the non-credit data taxonomy**, inventorying more than 80 data elements against availability, quality, collection difficulty, and priority. Ivy Tech's taxonomy was adapted from the [Rutgers Education and Employment Research Center's \(EERC\) non-credit data taxonomy](#) and spans four domains (purpose and design; non-credit outcomes; enrollment and demographics; finance and policy);
- **Employer listening with four virtual focus group sessions** with Indiana advanced manufacturers, deliberately segmented by role into HR leaders, technical leads, and C-suite executives with multiple employer partners per focus group for cross-industry insights;
- **Framework building** through a [May 2026 regional employer convening](#) that gathered employer feedback on course pathways and ROI; and
- A **cross-partner, in-person workshop** that translated findings into recommendations.

To determine course effectiveness, Ivy Tech identified key metrics across each of the three interests named in the ROI framework; for students, employment and wage outcomes; for employers, productivity and return; and for the system as a whole, supply and demand impact by sector and alignment to the state's own Top Jobs Indiana star-rating system. This last piece will ensure the College's ROI framework is validated against the same standard the state uses to define a good job, rather than solely relying on Ivy Tech's own assessment of value.



EARLY RESULTS & MILESTONES:

Learning Employer Pain Points

Ivy Tech spent the first few months of the project assessing its own data ecosystem and understanding the nuances of non-credit data. By January 2026, that groundwork gave way to direct employer listening sessions, each one testing and refining what the College thought it knew about manufacturer needs. **All of it built toward May 2026, when a regional employer convening and a cross-partner workshop turned a year of listening into concrete recommendations.**

The milestones produced a tangible direction for the College. Labor market data and qualitative employer feedback together pointed Ivy Tech toward five high-wage, high-demand Advanced Manufacturing pathways: Advanced Manufacturing Principles, Computer Numerical Controlled (CNC) Programming, Industrial Maintenance, Supervisory Leadership for Advanced Manufacturing (Frontline Supervisory Training), and Programmable Logic Controls. That direction is also reshaping how the College listens to industry in the first place.



Non-credit programming has traditionally followed academic program review or responded to one-off employer requests for contract training; College leadership is now weighing a more systematic, ongoing approach to industry input for key sectors. Employers have asked for these conversations to continue, and the College is expanding its practices to incorporate regular employer input into how programs are designed, measured, and revised.



That engagement also surfaced a finding that reframed the project's purpose: **no participating employer measures training ROI comprehensively, with practices ranging from tracking a single metric, usually retention or downtime, to tracking nothing at all.** Though every employer expressed intent to build that capability, HR leaders described the real difficulty of justifying training budgets without ROI evidence. That gap repositioned the ROI framework as shared infrastructure employers themselves need, not just something the College reports on.

Alongside these employer-facing findings, Ivy Tech's own data infrastructure moved forward over the course of the year, strengthening the connections between its skills training programs, state outcome systems, regional labor market demand, and industry-recognized credential attainment. That infrastructure work reached a concrete milestone in August 2026 when Ivy Tech signed and executed a data sharing agreement with Indiana's Department of Workforce Development to collect non-credit program wages from the UI database, a significant step toward building shared ROI infrastructure.

LESSONS LEARNED & WHAT'S NEXT:

Continuing the Conversation

What started as three separate accountability pressures now has the beginning of one shared framework capable of answering all three. The work ahead is putting that framework into practice and using the newly available wage data to measure real outcomes, continuing the employer conversations that are already asking to keep going, and testing whether a model built for advanced manufacturing can extend to other sectors and campuses across the system.

This year's work helped move the College closer to answering the question that everyone was asking in their own language: does non-credit training deliver a return, and if so, to whom?

Three elements of the engagement worked especially well. The taxonomy gave Ivy Tech a shared vocabulary for that answer; the employer engagement gave it real-world validation; and the August 2026 data sharing agreement gave the College the wage data needed to build the evidence back about what is working.

Employer engagement was high throughout the project, from the virtual focus group sessions through the regional convening. The non-credit data taxonomy was useful, giving the College a structured way to understand its broader skills training data landscape. Challenges included the delayed timeline on the data sharing agreement, which pushed back the College's implementation timeline. A second challenge, however, remains open: ensuring the wage data collected represents a broad enough sample of participants and meets standard data quality benchmarks for timeliness, completeness, and accuracy, so the resulting ROI measures can be fully trusted.

For peers in the field pursuing similar work, the team offers a few recommendations:

- **Employers need ROI evidence to make the case for continued investment, but most lack the systems to produce it themselves.** Colleges that build measurement frameworks can simultaneously meet reporting requirements and provide infrastructure employers need.
- **Utilize the Rutgers EERC Non-Credit Taxonomy as a starting framework.** As a program and data classification tool, the taxonomy offers a national framework for defining or redefining internal classifications and structuring data at the postsecondary institutional level.
- **Data sharing agreements should be built around taxonomy-aligned data, rather than whatever data happens to already exist,** so the resulting agreement can deliver outcome measures required by multiple stakeholders.

Learn more about Ivy Tech Community College [here](#).