

# NEW BENCHMARK LAUNCHES FOR TALENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

At its annual Indiana Workforce Summit in late October, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce unveiled a new Workforce First Employer designation program. This isn't just another badge for a website. The intent is that it signals an organization is leading the charge in workforce development, talent innovation and economic growth.



The Workforce First Employer designation highlights organizations whose human resources teams are actively engaged in professional development – both internally for employees and externally through collaboration with education and workforce partners.

“Employers that earn the Workforce First Employer recognition will demonstrate a commitment to maintaining and developing robust workforce strategies, including talent attraction, upskilling, reskilling and retention efforts that align with regional and state economic priorities,” explains Todd Hurst, the Indiana Chamber’s senior vice president of strategic partnerships and impact. “Their practices support long-term employee growth and directly contribute to the competitiveness and prosperity of the state’s economy.”

Designated employers are recognized for their meaningful input into education and workforce systems – such as shaping curriculum, informing policy, offering work-based learning and building pipelines for emerging talent. They serve as models of how industry can effectively partner with education and public-sector stakeholders to build a responsive, future-ready workforce.

According to Hurst, the Workforce First Employer designation was developed partially in response to a request from the Indiana Department of Education, which sought better alignment between education outcomes and employer engagement – especially around the implementation of new high school diploma seals that recognize students for work-based learning, earned credentials of value and career readiness.

This program, Hurst emphasizes, is not a standalone silo. Rather, it’s designed to align with and complement other workforce, education and choice employer initiatives. The Indiana Chamber is working closely with industry sector partnerships, local chambers of commerce, workforce boards and economic development partners.

“Our goal is to make it seamless and streamlined for employers to engage, without duplicating existing efforts – and to add value, not burden,” Hurst notes.

If your organization is investing in people and building partnerships that matter, the Indiana Chamber urges you to get the designation process started.

“Whether you’re fully integrated or just beginning your talent development strategy, the Workforce First Employer designation is a way to track, celebrate and improve,” Hurst offers.

The program is operationalized between the Indiana Chamber and its subsidiary, the Institute for Workforce Excellence.

## AT A GLANCE

### The Designation Represents Commitment to:

- Internal development (upskilling, job quality)
- External partnerships (schools, postsecondary institutions, community)
- Strategic workforce integration aligned with regional and statewide priorities.

### Six Focus Areas for Recognition:

1. Work-Based Learning
  - Internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, mentorships
2. Education Engagement (K–12 and Postsecondary/Adult)
  - Curriculum input, advisory roles, classroom collaboration
3. Upskilling and Reskilling
  - Internal training, certifications, tuition reimbursement/assistance
4. Job and Wage Quality
  - Competitive pay, benefits, upward mobility
5. Workforce Partnerships and Community Prosperity
  - Collaboration with workforce boards, nonprofits, government
6. Strategic Workforce Integration (Internal Organization Talent Processes/Procedures)
  - Embedding workforce strategy into operations and leadership culture

### Designation Levels:

Advocate and Champion

### What Employers Gain:

- Recognition as a leader in workforce development
- Enhanced visibility to jobseekers, educators and policymakers
- Alignment with statewide economic and education initiatives
- Access to partnerships, pilot opportunities and shared learning spaces

**RESOURCE:** [www.indianachamber.com/workforcefirst](http://www.indianachamber.com/workforcefirst)

A banner for the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. On the left, the text "CONNECT WITH THE CHAMBER" is written in white and yellow. To the right is a yellow thumbs-up icon. Below the text are icons for YouTube, X, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. On the far right is the Indiana Chamber logo, which includes the text "INDIANA CHAMBER" and "LEADING BUSINESS | ADVANCING INDIANA" above a stylized white arrow graphic. The background of the banner shows a person's hands using a smartphone in an office setting.