

## HOW TO IDENTIFY & CULTIVATE INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS – A PROFILE

One of the biggest mistakes people make is to target the wrong kind of individual from businesses for engagement. Sometimes, companies will be identified and a generic “Dear CEO” letter will go out, with the hope that the executives in question will at least send a representative to the meeting. Or, people will assume that they should target the head of human resources, because our grant requires that they ask business about their training needs. Or, because this is a request from the community, that the best person to work with is the head of community relations. Or, they know of a business person who has been on a panel, fill out a survey, be part of a focus group, or receive services, and is willing to return the call.

While these are all practical responses to the challenge of business engagement, they are doomed to fail. Why? None of them take into consideration the characteristics of the individuals involved, only that they are executives at local businesses that have been targeted for engagement. Fortunately, there is an alternative—a much more effective way to identify industry champions, the kind of individuals from business that will not only participate, but take ownership of developing and driving an action agenda, working with community partners.

We like to call these kind of leaders “civic entrepreneurs.”

**They have three strong traits.**

1. *They are decision-makers in their businesses.* They not only care about the growth and competitiveness of their firm, but are in a position to take action on behalf of the firm, working in partnership with other companies and community partners. They can commit their own time, those of subordinates, and financial and other in-kind resources of their company. They are not representatives sent by their superior, able to listen in but not take action.
2. *They are passionate about their industry.* They feel strongly about the value of their industry, that it has the potential to grow. They can articulate specific opportunities for growth (new markets, new technological breakthroughs, etc.), or a broader vision for evolution of their industry. For them, it’s a calling, not just a job or another rung on the corporate ladder. Because they care for their industry, they see opportunities for businesses to work together, and are able to understand that there are “pre-competitive” areas where even fierce competitors can collaborate for the common good. They are positive-sum, not zero-sum thinkers.
3. *They are passionate about their community—and believe that the destinies of their company, industry, and community are interdependent.* They often have a track

record of giving back to the community, speaking out on issues, providing internships to local students, or working through organizations like industry associations or chambers of commerce to improve the quality of the community. They may have grown up locally, or moved to the community, but either way, they love the distinctive quality of life it offers. Most importantly, they know that a strong economy is essential to a strong community and vice versa. And, they understand that it takes the private sector and public sector working together to achieve that result.

How do you find these leaders? Here is where you need to leverage the knowledge and relationships of all the members of your regional team. Often, local business organizations like chambers and associations have the access to these civic entrepreneurs. Sometimes, they are on boards of organizations that are part of your regional team, or your board members know them personally and can help identify and recruit them. Once you find and recruit one or more of these individuals, they will know more civic entrepreneurs like them. There is no *one* way to find these leaders, except by creatively leveraging people and relationships in your region.

### Questions to Guide Your Search

1. Who would members of our regional team suggest as civic entrepreneurs, and how do they reflect the three traits above?
2. Who on our boards is a business civic entrepreneur, and/or has relationships with other civic entrepreneurs?
3. What other organizations have access to business civic entrepreneurs in our region and how can we work with them?
4. Who is best positioned to contact potential civic entrepreneur industry champions? Who has the strongest relationships with these individuals?

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