

**Building Strong
Public/Private Partnerships
in Information Technology:
A Cross-Cultural Primer**

**The Techforce Initiative—
Building IT School-to-Career Partnerships**

Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC)

Information Technology Association of America (ITAA)

National Alliance of Business (NAB)

Introduction

Information technology (IT) is transforming our society. It is changing the ways that we work and learn, and, in the process, is creating the potential for synergy between historically disparate groups. In particular, there are rich opportunities for educators and IT industry professionals who grasp the key aspects of the changes underway.

Effective public/private partnerships in IT are critical to helping both educators and businesses develop the workforce of tomorrow. Education-to-employment initiatives have the potential to develop millions of successful, technologically advantaged students ready to enter the workforce. They can also help to build productive and lasting relationships between the business and education communities.

There are, however, significant difficulties inherent in creating effective partnerships between business and education, and in implementing successful education-to-employment programs. Foremost among these is the dynamic tension between the culture of business and the culture of education. Within business/education partnerships there may be unspoken differences in expectations, difficulties with communication, and stresses that result from vastly different perspectives and ways of working.

A deep understanding of each partner's culture can go a long way toward maintaining positive relationships between educators and employers. The purpose of this resource, *A Cross-Cultural*

Primer, is to assist IT professionals, educators, and leaders of intermediary organizations* in developing that understanding, and setting up successful education-to-employment systems as a

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result. Toward that end, this primer is designed as a tool to help educators and employers:

- ◆ understand that each of us has an organizational culture that we bring into partnership activities;
- ◆ recognize common cultural issues that get in the way of effective partnership building;
- ◆ learn, through examples and short case studies, how others have dealt with these issues in ways that respect each organization's culture while meeting the shared objectives of the partnership;

*Groups that recruit industry involvement and facilitate smooth relationships between business and education.

- ◆ consider strategies that can help to build cross-cultural competencies within local partnerships; and
- ◆ access resources that expand knowledge and skills in this area.

Much of the information presented here on culture represents broad generalizations about the nature of both business and education. It is designed to provoke discussion rather than present an exact portrayal of the IT industry or education. Every individual organization, company, and school has a unique culture and style of working, which is

dependent on a variety of factors, including the organization's history, leadership, degree of success, and status and role in society as perceived by itself and by others.

This document is an illustrative rather than exhaustive look at a complex subject. With it, we hope to encourage partnership members to explore their partners' cultures as well as their own, and to raise awareness about culture's often unseen presence and the effects that it can have on understanding, perceptions, and the ability to communicate effectively.