

Developing Program Partners - 12 Steps

Step 1: Define Your Potential Partners

Assemble a team (teachers, counselors, administrators) and develop answers to the questions below. This will take some time and research.

- How do you define your industry? Keep your definition as broad and inclusive as possible to include many different partners.
- What are the types of companies/agencies/organizations that are part of this industry?
- What are some leading companies in your city/county associated with this industry?
- What associations serve these companies/agencies?
- What local postsecondary education institutions are associated with this industry?
- Who do you or your colleagues know who is associated with this industry (parents, friends, school board members, current school business partners in other fields)?

Step 2: Recruit Your First Few Partners

It is important that administrators, including the principal and even the superintendent, be involved with partner recruitment. The higher the level of contact from the school the likelier you will find a committed partner.

- Think of all individuals, organizations, and groups that can serve as beneficial partners. Considerations should include, but are not limited to, community organizations (i.e. Chamber of Commerce, non-for-profits, industry specific organizations, local unions), local employers, industry professionals, postsecondary institutions, local government, and relevant school organizations such as a Parent Teacher Organization.
- Define the partner as an organization, not an individual. Pick the top ten partners you would like to have. Ask colleagues if they have a personal contact in any of the organizations. Make phone contacts and set up appointments to meet personally.
- Design and produce a recruitment letter and a brochure that describes your program. Print multiple copies so that you and your colleagues can distribute them wherever and whenever you meet possible partners. Be aware of any community activities or special events that provide an opportunity for recruitment.
- Invite the potential partner(s) to be a member of the Advisory Board that will make the decisions regarding curriculum, budget, calendar, activities, and so on. Stress how your program will provide students with knowledge about the industry and encouragement to enter the industry. For those partners who cannot commit to serving on the Advisory Board, keep a list and include them in for activities and events of interest to them or their organization. The Advisory Board is “key” to long term success, however, other partners can also support your program.
 - Example: A partner may not be able to commit to regular attendance at Board meetings, but he or she can help support career awareness and exploration activities such as hosting a once-a-year field trip or attending a career day.
 - Example: A partner may not be able to commit to regular attendance at Board meetings, but he or she may be able to act as a mentor for team-based challenges.

Before an organization commits to a partnership, it may be necessary to obtain the approval of a high-ranking executive. This individual will then, more than likely, assign another person to assume primary responsibility for the program, who may in turn select others or request volunteers for particular assignments (e.g., advisory committee members, mentors, speakers, coordinators of internships)

There are several strategies that can be utilized when you are looking to build partnerships with businesses and community organizations. During the Illinois P-20 Network Spring Meeting (2020), educators shared ideas and strategies that have proven effective for building and maintaining partnerships. Throughout this course, you will see some of these clips highlighting examples and strategies as they relate to content being covered.

Watch the clip from the [Illinois P-20 Network Spring Meeting \(2020\)](#) in which the concepts of “telling your story” and “the ask” are outlined. These strategies can be easily implemented and have proven to be beneficial regardless of current levels of partnership. When “telling your story,” you want to be sure to highlight important information for stakeholders to know, events, and successes of your program. “The ask” takes it one step further by publicizing the need you have in your classroom and communicating to employers or community organizations how they can support student learning. As you watch, begin reflecting on “your story”, how you may communicate that, and how you can incorporate an “ask” that would enhance your Work-Based Learning program.

Step 3: Organize And Use Your Advisory Board

Another strategy for building partnerships is to form and utilize advisory groups. Advisory groups, in general, have proven effective in schools to enhance partnerships and increase opportunities for students. Watch the clip from the [Illinois P-20 Network Spring Meeting \(2020\)](#) in which the concept of utilizing advisory groups is outlined and examples of successful advisory groups are briefly discussed.

Advisory groups play an important role in developing and enhancing partnerships. ; understanding this reinforces the need and importance to form your Work-Based Learning Advisory Board early and to include them in the planning process.

After Advisory Board members are identified, the first step is to hold an organizational meeting to determine place, time and frequency of meetings and who will serve as chair. If possible, have a Board member serve as the co-chair with you. Set up a steering committee calendar for the year.

Example: quarterly meetings, rotating among the high school, supporting organizations, and the local community college, from seven to nine a.m. with a continental breakfast and the host serving as chair

- The partner decides which employee(s) will represent it on the Board. In addition to your partners, you should include faculty, a counselor, and administrators.
- Define the responsibilities to be handled by the Advisory Board so that meetings are productive for everyone. Use the expertise of your members. For example, do not focus on small decisions better left to administrators or teachers. Use the group to discuss and establish the topics that will be brought before the Board for review and approval. Examples of possible Board topics include:

- Review of technical course sequence,
- Identifying possible dual enrollment subjects
- Identifying/ providing needed equipment
- Planning speakers and field trips
- identifying mentors
- Approving the annual budget
- Recruiting additional partners
- Evaluate completed activities (e.g., speaker program, summer internships)
- Solving problems that develop
- Provide time for brainstorming during your meetings.
- Develop a process to keep the Advisory Board informed. Someone must be responsible for taking notes, distributing them, sending reminder notices, and developing agendas. Someone must also be responsible for responding to phone calls and emails from partners.

Suggestion: At the conclusion of the meeting develop the agenda for the next meeting with input from all participants.

Step 4: Define The Partners' Roles And Responsibilities

At the initial meeting, discuss the expectations for the Board.

- Explain that you are asking for the valuable contribution of the time and talents of individuals.
- Lead a discussion of the group so that each member participates in developing the roles and responsibilities of the Board.
- Prepare a brief handout with the different needs of your program and the ways in which the Board can assist you and your students
- Revisit roles and responsibilities during the last meeting of the year. Review what has been accomplished and have Board members develop a new plan for expanded roles and responsibilities.

Individuals who volunteer as partners have varied talents to share with students. Try to learn about these talents during the meetings and match them with your student interests and needs. One partner may be willing to come to the classroom and talk about his or her job. Another partner may volunteer to host a field trip. A trio of business partners may agree to work together and mentor students. One or two partners may be willing to take on the responsibility for organizing and hosting your meetings. Be sure everyone is involved and engaged. Follow up with partners who miss regularly scheduled Board meetings.

All members of the Board should be involved in helping to ensure student attainment of Essential Skills and Technical Competencies. Some Board members might work with teachers to help improve alignment of activities with intended learning outcomes. Others might review student assessment data together with teachers and school leaders to determine areas of program strength and areas needing improvement. Others might review student work and provide feedback in relation to the Essential Skills and Technical Competencies.

- Revisit roles and responsibilities during the last meeting of the year. Review what has been accomplished and have Board members develop a new plan for expanded roles and responsibilities.

Step 5: Develop An Activities Calendar

Develop a calendar to organize not only the Board meetings, but also the activities your Board plans. Organization is critical for the success and maintenance of your partners.

- The activities calendar can be electronic and should include not only the Advisory Board meetings, but also dates and times for field trips, classroom presentations, mentor activities, due dates for semester projects, parent meetings, student celebrations, and industry events.
- The calendar is fluid, updated monthly and reviewed at each Advisory Board meeting. Sharing student and school activities with the partners helps them to learn about the needs of students and the culture of the school.
- Work on the calendar is continuous because dates change and new opportunities emerge. The calendar can also be used at the end of the school year for a Board discussion of program improvements

In addition to planning Board activities, you should develop a marketing plan to publicize your Work-Based Learning program and your community partners supporting the program. In order to increase awareness of businesses and community groups, you should plan monthly activities to actively engage with community groups. Some examples of monthly tasks that can be completed are:

- Utilize the various community and human resources available to enrich Work-Based Learning.
- Conduct various public relations events.
- Contact and utilize various news media.
- Plan and publicize Work-Based Learning student programs, events, projects, materials, community service, etc.
- Call on previous and potential Work-Based Learning partners to promote your program.
- Utilize the resources of other agencies such as Illinois Department of Employment Security, Chamber of Commerce, trade unions, etc.
- Develop and maintain a community personnel resource file.
- Represent Work-Based Learning as a guest speaker at various community and service clubs and organizations.
- Arrange for students to represent Work-Based Learning as guest speakers at various community and service clubs and organizations.
- Provide marketing materials relating to Work-Based Learning in prominent areas in the community.

Step 6: Recruit Classroom Activities

Partners bring the industry, postsecondary education, and the “real world” into the classroom. They provide general information about their industry, support for the academic disciplines, or offer specialized training. Ideas for classroom presentations frequently come from the Advisory Boards, other partners, colleagues and friends. Ideas often emerge during informal discussions at industry

functions or on field trips or working with mentors. Often, a partner will recommend contacting a colleague who has particular expertise to share.

Watch the [clip from the Illinois P-20 Network Spring Meeting \(2020\)](#) to gain a deeper understanding of what “inviting businesses into the classroom” may look like in practice.

Step 7: Recruit Site Visit Partners

The field trip experience is a major component in the success of work-based learning.

- Develop a brief handout for your Advisory Board that includes sample times for site visits and the kinds of activities they might include: tours, demonstrations, brief presentations, and hands-on opportunities.
- Share the kind of classroom lesson and follow up assignment you will use to tie the field trip to the students’ academic learning. Discuss the different opportunities various Board members can offer.
- With the Board, develop a calendar of field trips that include a variety of experiences sequenced to a continuum of academic expectations.

Step 8: Recruit Mentors

The Advisory Board is an excellent resource for the recruitment of mentors. Develop your own plan for mentor activities and share it with the Board. Be prepared to discuss the different ways in which mentors work with students at other schools.

- Work with your Advisory Board members to develop a well-planned, structured mentor experience for your students.
- Ask members to help you recruit mentors.
- Evaluate those experiences and share that evaluation with Board members as they assist in recruiting additional mentors and refining the experience
- If a partner cannot commit to being a long-term mentor, they may be able to be a mentor for team-based challenges.

Suggestion: Having mentors work in pairs or groups of three works well; if one person cannot attend the meeting or event, there are others to take his/her place.

Suggestion: Another consideration is to have an individual who serves as a classroom mentor to guide students and provide feedback as appropriate; this ensures that all students have an opportunity to engage with a mentor. This is a useful tactic in communities with limited community partners.

Example Mentor Activities:

- Participate in a lunch and learn or group activity with students.
- Meet with a student once a month either at the school or at the partner site
- Mentor small groups of students at school as tutors
- Participate in group mentoring activities

- Act as an email mentor answering a predetermined set of questions related to the industry
- Provide advice and resources as a mentor for a student project
- Mentor students during team-based challenges

Step 9: Develop Formal Partnerships

A great way to gain partners and financial support is to be formally partnered with a company or related organization. This is particularly important if your school is located in a large city and competes with other schools for support.

Formal partnerships may be developed with a specific business, an industry association, an intermediary organization such as a school-business alliance or Chamber of Commerce, or any other group that interfaces with that industry. A formal partnership may be logical and productive for both your program and the partner.

There are a number of potential advantages to formal partnerships:

1. Access to all the employees and/or the roster of members so that you can then recruit individual partners
2. Specified annual commitments of personnel time and talent
3. Grants, used equipment, instructional materials, and attendance at industry functions
4. Status, as your partnership is publicized by the company

Step 10: Make Your Postsecondary Organizations Partners

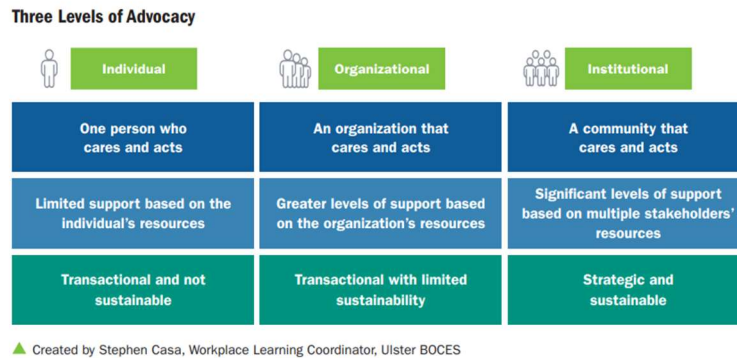
Postsecondary organizations are important to your Advisory Board and should have representatives from departments related to your industry and/or involved in the dual credit process for your students. These partners can offer advice about curriculum development, particularly in technical classes. They can assist in clarity about requirements and enrollment, and they may provide college courses for students to take through dual enrollment. They can also introduce staff to other sources of information related to the industry and possible sources of funding.

Students should have a site visit to one or more of the postsecondary partner sites each year to learn about the opportunities they provide and the necessary academic experiences and achievement required to enroll. As outlined in the [PaCE Framework](#), a student should visit at least three postsecondary institutions by the end of 11th grade.

Post-secondary institutions offer a wealth of opportunities for students that are either not communicated to the high school student directly, or get lost in the chain of command at various school-wide conversations. Direct conversations from post-secondary professionals and program directors to students often fill that gap and provide a more in depth and intimate conversation around students' post-secondary options.

Step 11: View Companies And Postsecondary Organizations, Not Individuals, As Your Partners

Change happens. Individuals are transferred, get new responsibilities, develop new community interests, and your program may no longer be a high priority. Individual partners may vary from year to year. Let your partners know early in the process that you understand.



Suggestion: As you recruit partners for your Advisory Board, suggest that they designate a substitute from their organization who will attend meetings when they cannot.

Step 12: Respond To Partner Concerns

Participating on an Advisory Board and working with teachers and students may be a new role for partners. They will have questions about how to successfully manage their roles and responsibilities.

Develop an opening and on-going process for answering questions and dealing with uncertainty and problems. Deal with issues immediately.

As often as possible, have written guidelines for activities involving students.

Concerns often focus on scheduling. It is important that every activity be assigned to a specific teacher who will organize it, contact the partner, and maintain contact until the activity is completed

Example: For a job shadowing event at a local company, develop a handout for the hosts that includes specific information:

- Students names
- Responsible school staff
- Mode of transportation and arrival/departure time
- Copy of pre-job shadow academic or technical assignment
- Copy of questions students may ask
- Copy of assignment students will complete after the job shadow
- Reminders about logistics: restroom, lunch, etc.
- Phone numbers to call in emergency

Once business and community partnerships are established, it is equally important to ensure that they are properly maintained. Although some of the techniques and strategies included in this module apply to both establishing and maintaining partnerships, greater detail on properly maintaining established partnerships will be outlined in later modules.