

Growing and Maintaining Partnerships

Long term planning and Recruitment of Future Partnership

Change happens: companies may dissolve or change their community focus; individuals may leave the company or move into new roles. View each partner as a potential long-term connection who is really only certain for the short-term. New partners bring in new ideas and activities. You may begin with ten business partners that you already know. As your program grows and you add students, you need to expand your community partnerships.

Example: One program began the first year with an emphasis on the energy industry and contacts in that field. During the second year, the partnerships expanded to include partner connections with the local Parks and Recreation Department, the Bureau of Land Management, and other environmental groups. When the energy industry encountered a cyclical downturn, the environmental partners stepped in and provided increased field trip sites, mentors, and service learning opportunities.

Value your Partners

Show your Advisory Board members and other partners that you value their time, effort and commitment. Provide opportunities for partners to be thanked by the students, parents and school staff. How much you value partners can be demonstrated in many ways:

- an end-of-year celebration
- a formal certificate of appreciation or a plaque
- thank you letters from the students following a site visit experience
- letters of appreciation sent to employers who have provided employee support
- formal commendations to employers from your school board
- Thank your partners for every activity they provide.

Provide opportunities for your partners to learn about student success. The goal is to use work-based learning to guide your students to graduation, postsecondary education, and successful careers. Your partners support these goals. Without violating student privacy, devise ways to highlight student improvement in grades, attendance and attitude and share this information with your partners. They want to know that their efforts are producing positive results.

The greatest compliment that you can give to your partners is to use the information that they provide you. Value what your partners recommend, offer assistance, and report back to you after an activity is completed. They see what is happening in your program in different ways than the faculty or administration. Sometimes partners are more positive about an event than the faculty, and sometimes they have concerns. Value this information and adjust your next activity to reflect this input. When partners know that you respect their opinions and ideas, they feel a vital part of student achievement and success.

Gap Analysis of Partners

While taking stock in the value of your current partners, it is also important to know where you are lacking partners, or gap partnership issues. Every Advisory has its specialty areas they want to develop for students, but being aware of where your Advisory falls short is an aspect that many Advisory groups are not aware of. Taking stock at this problem in some point of your yearly process is important for a host of reasons:

- Develops conversations on missing input from a certain industry or career
- Provides a conversation around missing educational opportunities for students
- Provide missing WBL clinical experiences, internships, or apprenticeship
- Allows for recruitment of individuals in the missing capacity

Be aware that not every industry can be represented in an Advisory setting, but if you have a major employer or career field that has a high percentage of local careers that are not represented, it can pose a problem in creating a Work Pipeline for your students. Ensuring that partnerships (Advisory and beyond) are comprehensive of your community and the workforce is essential. Do not limit your focus to one or two dominating sectors of the regional workforce.

In the process of considering a Gap Analysis, Tool 20 on the [School-Community Partnership Guideline](#) (pages 31-33) is one of the better resources that look at which industries you are potentially missing in your WBL Advisory or programming. Highlight the ones that you feel match an industry that is vital to the operations of your community. Be sure to have a conversation with your current Advisory members on this document prior to sitting down and discussing it. You may also develop your own document to match your own community's needs.

Recruitment of Additional Partners

Prior to formulating an official recruitment strategy to obtain additional partners, make sure these things are in place:

- Value your partnerships and partners – word of mouth experiences spread in the business and non-for-profit world
- Publicize and share the wins with partners at schools, social media, websites and in local news outlets
- Celebrate current partners at an end of year celebration
- Complete a Gap Analysis of Partners

Below are some strategies for increasing partnership:

- Develop a clear communication 1 page sheet communicating “the Ask”
- Develop a strategy to hit various formal and informal platforms
 - Formal
 - School website
 - City/County Webpages
 - Informal
 - Social media accounts in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Sit down with the Advisory to tackle the communications and Gap Analysis and do reach out sessions as part of regularly scheduled meetings – using the flipped approach
 - Go through the list together and track communications with potential stakeholders
- Put the word out with large government entities
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - City Government
 - County Government
 - Regional Groups
 - Non-for-profit leaders
 - Local Farm Bureau
 - Church organizations

- Large Stakeholders
- Pick up the phone – email alone is not a sufficient recruitment tool
- Encourage word of mouth exchanges with current partners to organizations you want to target
- Create a “Get to Know Us” event inviting potential partners to an eatery or place that is comfortable if they have questions
 - These are recommended over Summer months so educators can attend and partake to share their experiences and stories
 - Free food and drinks are always a plus with these types of events