

Best Practices for Building and Expanding Industry Partnerships

A well planned and thought out process is vital to productive industry partnerships. Use these best practices to lay the foundation for success as you work to cultivate collaborations with business partners.

- **Work with industry partners to establish a shared vision.** It is fundamental that both the school and/or district and the business partner have a clear understanding of the structure of the partnership and identify overlapping priorities from the onset. Be specific so that all stakeholders are clear on the hopes for and intended direction of the collaboration.
- **Define school or district processes and protocols to ensure student safety and success.** As students work alongside or build relationships with non-district personnel, it is critical to prioritize safety and wellbeing. Be sure industry partners are aware of school or district requirements for background checks and appropriate protocols. Build into the structure that someone on the school side of the partnership regularly checks in with students or visits a business site to ensure these practices are being followed.
- **Clearly define roles, expectations, and points of contact.** At the start of an industry partnership, it is essential to define the commitments of time and resources for everyone involved. Being clear about expectations up front helps to prevent frustrations down the line and allows for a shared understanding of success. It is also very important that there is a specified point of contact on both the school and the business side. And, to ensure the longevity of the partnership, ensure that the responsibility for the partnership is handed off to another point of contact if there are transitions between personnel.

- **Ensure alignment between company and student learning goals.** A good partnership comes from mutual understanding of common objectives. At the beginning of the process, make sure to clearly articulate how the partnership or student experiences will benefit the learning and have the company clearly articulate its goals. Throughout the collaboration, take time to evaluate how the experience is enhancing the students' learning and skill development and make changes as necessary.
- **Communicate regularly and seek feedback.** Clear communication is the foundation for any successful partnership. It is important that business partners feel that they have appropriate guidance and support from the school or district. And, it is vital that the school or district regularly checks in with the business partners to ask for information and updates. From establishing the shared vision, to connecting the relevant stakeholders, to assessing success, regular and open communication allows for ongoing refinement and promotes optimal outcomes for businesses and students.
- **Celebrate success and share gratitude.** An industry partnership requires time, resources, and energy from the business partners. Take time to thank businesses directly and have students write thank you notes or emails so that it is clear that the value of the contributions is recognized. Also, share news of the partnerships and related successes publicly via social media, school or district newsletters, and any other relevant communications so the entire community can honor the commitment and efforts of participating businesses.