



TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF

EDUCATION

FIRST TO THE TOP

Fifteen Steps: Developing & Sustaining Advisory Boards and Program Partnerships

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.

- 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 host a once-a-year field trip.*

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).

STEP 3: ORGANIZE AND USE YOUR ADVISORY BOARD

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 am 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.
 - *Example: The Board can choose to review technical course sequence, identify possible dual enrollment subjects, identify/ provide needed equipment, plan speakers and field trips, identify mentors, approve the annual budget, recruit additional partners, evaluate completed activities (e.g., speaker program, summer internships), solve 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

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 standards. 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 standards.

- *Example: One of your goals should be to expand the partner base to include a variety of resource people who can assist in all aspects of the program. Partners can help with this expansion using their contacts in the community and the industry.*
- 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.

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.

STEP 7: RECRUIT FIELD TRIP SITES

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 field trips 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. Use an application for both the mentor and the student with clear expectations and outcomes.
- Evaluate those experiences and share that evaluation with Board members as they assist in recruiting additional mentors and refining the experience.

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.

Example Mentor Activities:

- *Participate in a luncheon 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 pre-determined set of questions related to the industry*
- *Provide advice and resources as a mentor for a student project*

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

Affiliate memberships in organizations may assist also. You may want to become an affiliate member of an organization that can provide your students with specialized knowledge or assistance.

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 field trip 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.

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 the 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 full 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

STEP 13: PUBLICIZE PARTNER ACTIVITIES

Partners agree to serve on the Advisory Board and work students for many reasons. These include wanting to assist young people to succeed, wanting to recruit young people to enter the industry, wanting to give back to the community, wanting approval from their company, or the company wanting approval from the community and/or its national headquarters.

- Provide your partners with positive publicity about the support they are giving you and your students. While maintain strong relationships with individuals, this also encourages other employees to volunteer. It enhances the company image in the community. If the company is national, it helps the local office to impress national headquarters with their volunteer spirit and industry promotional efforts.
- Ask students to write stories for the school newspaper and parent newsletter and have them make presentations to the school board. Public relations representatives from your industry partners are also useful and have ideas for publicizing the work of your Board; they can write stories for their industry newsletters.
- Try to involve your local newspaper or television stations in student events – a field trip to an industry site or student presentations to your partners. These stories provide human interest, showing students interacting with industry representatives and give your partners recognition within the community and with their peers.
- Host a career day or partner day to generate positive publicity. This is an opportunity to not only recognize your current partners, but also recruit potential partners

Examples:

- *The district holds an annual Principal Partners Day, and each school hosts 15 to 20 business leaders. During the day, visitors talk with students and teachers and visit classrooms where students are*

presenting about their work-based learning experience. This provides an informal opportunity to recognize current partners and also recruit additional partners.

- *The energy industry has mixed reactions from the general public. Working with students, providing mentors and internships, as well as serving on the Advisory Committee, gives the energy industry an opportunity to demonstrate their value and service. They are presented in a positive way. Newspaper articles about field trips present the industry favorably, quoting positive student reactions while explaining what the students have seen and learned.*

STEP 14: CONTINUALLY EXPAND PARTNER CONTACTS

Change happens: companies dissolve or change their community focus, and individuals 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 Advisory Board.

Example: One program began the first year with an emphasis on the energy industry and contacts in that field. During the second year the Board 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.

STEP 15: VALUE YOUR PARTNERS

Show your Advisory Board members and other partners 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 field trip 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 in 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.