

# Fifteen Steps to Developing and Sustaining Advisory Boards and Program Partnerships

Advisory boards that consist of engaged employers and postsecondary partners are a critical component of a robust career and technical education (CTE) program. Strong advisory board partners often become the best work-based learning (WBL) partners because of their familiarity with the school and students. The following steps are designed to develop and sustain strong advisory boards and CTE partnerships.

\*Note: This is general guidance and does not constitute legal advice. You should consult with your team, including your board attorney, to ensure compliance with board policies and state and federal law. This includes requirements relating to volunteers, off-campus field trips, background checks, student labor laws, and student information.

## Step 1: Define Your Potential Partners

Assemble a team of teachers, counselors, administrators, and other key stakeholders to develop answers to the questions below. This step will take some time and research:

- How do you define the industry connected to your CTE program?
  - Keep your definition as broad as possible to include many different partners.
- What types of companies, agencies, or organizations are a part of this industry?
- What are some leading companies in your local area that are associated with this industry?
- Who do you or your colleagues know who is associated with this industry?
  - Consider parents, friends, school board members, and current employer partners from other industries.

## Step 2: Recruit Your First Partners

It is important that administrators, including the principal and the Director of Schools, be involved in partner recruitment. The higher the level of contact from the school, the more likely you will find a committed partner. Use the following strategies when recruiting partners:

- 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 or email contacts and set up appointments to meet personally.
- Design and produce a recruitment letter and/or a brochure that describes your program. Print multiple copies so you and your colleagues can distribute them wherever and whenever you meet a potential partner. 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, etc. 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 activities and/or events of interest to their organization. The advisory board is key to long-term

success. However, partners can support your program in many other ways, such as guest speaking in your building, industry tours, and participation in employer-led project-based learning.

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 the primary responsibility for the program. That individual may in turn select others or request volunteers for different engagement opportunities.

### Step 3: Organize and Involve Your Advisory Board

Hold an organizational meeting to determine the place, time, and frequency of meetings. If possible, have a board member serve as the co-chair for your board. Set up a steering committee calendar for the year. Advisory boards typically meet quarterly and may rotate the location of meetings between the school and different employer locations.

- The partner decides which employee(s) will be representatives. In addition to employers, include faculty, parents, students, counselors, 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. Do not focus on small decisions that are better left to school personnel. Use the group to discuss and establish the topics that will be brought before the board for approval.
  - **Example:** *The board can choose to review technical course scope and sequence, identify possible dual enrollment opportunities, provide equipment and other resources, plan and coordinate speaking and field trip opportunities, identify mentors, approve budget recommendations, recruit additional partners, and address challenges and barriers to program growth.*
- Provide time for brainstorming during your meetings.
- Develop a process to keep the advisory board informed. Meeting minutes should be documented and distributed to all board members after each meeting, including those who may not be able to attend.
- At the conclusion of each meeting, recommend action steps to be taken in the months following the meeting and establish as many agenda items as possible for the next meeting.

### 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 individuals' time and talents.
- 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 how the board can assist you and your students.

Individuals who volunteer as partners have varied talents to share with students. Learn about these talents during the meeting and match them with your students' interests and needs. One partner may be willing to come to the classroom and talk about their job. Another partner may volunteer to host a field trip. A group

of partners may agree to work together for student mentoring. Others may want to organize and host future meetings. Be sure everyone is involved and engaged. Follow up with partners who miss regularly scheduled board meetings and keep them informed.

All members of the board should be involved in helping ensure student mastery of course standards. Some members might work with teachers to improve the alignment of activities with intended learning outcomes. Others might review non-personally identifiable student assessment data trends with teachers and administrators to determine areas of program strength and areas for program refinement. 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 sustainability of your program:

- The activities calendar can be electronic and should include advisory board meeting information, as well as other planned activities like classroom presentations, field trips, mentor activities, projects, and WBL site visits.
- The calendar is not static and thus should be updated in real-time and reviewed during each board meeting. Participating in student and school activities also helps board members understand the school culture and other opportunities for partnerships.
- Work on the calendar is ongoing because dates may change due to unforeseen circumstances.

### **Step 6: Recruit Classroom Activities**

Partners bring their respective industry, postsecondary education, and other real-world elements to the classroom. They provide general information about the industry, support for the academic disciplines, or offer specialized training. Ideas for classroom presentations frequently come from advisory boards and other external partners. Ideas often emerge during informal discussions at industry-hosted functions or on field trips when engaging with partners. Often an advisory board member will recommend contacting a colleague or other partner who has expertise to share. This is an excellent opportunity to further expand your board.

### **Step 7: Recruit Field Trip Sites**

The field trip experience is a major component in the success of a WBL program, as it often provides students with their first exposure to the workplace environment.

- Develop a brief handout for your advisory board that includes sample times for field trips and the kinds of activities that will best inform students.
- Share the classroom lesson and follow-up assignments you will use to tie the field trip to the curriculum.

- Discuss different opportunities that board members can offer. Use this information to populate a calendar of field trips and other activities in sequence to advance students' understanding of the industry.

### **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.

- 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 the mentor and for the student that includes clear expectations and outcomes.
- Evaluate those experiences and share that evaluation with the board members as they assist in recruiting additional mentors and refine the experience.
- Have mentors work in pairs or groups of three if possible.

Provide a list of potential mentor activities, including but not limited to:

- Participate in a luncheon or group activity with students.
- Meet with a student once a month – or more frequently if possible – at the school or worksite.
- Mentor small groups of students at the school as tutors.
- Participate in group mentoring activities with other mentors.
- Act as an email mentor answering a set of pre-determined questions related to the industry.
- Provide advice and resources for student projects.

### **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, or any other group that interfaces with that industry. A formal partnership may be logical and productive for all stakeholders.

There are several potential advantages to formal partnerships:

- Formal partnerships specify annual commitments of personnel, time, and talent.
- Grants, used equipment, instructional materials, and attendance at industry functions are clearly documented and can be more easily monitored.
- Over time as the partnership demonstrates success, partners may receive publicity and praise from local media and others.

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. These organizations often open the door to new WBL internship opportunities as well.

### **Step 10: Make Your Postsecondary Institutions Advisory Board Partners**

Postsecondary organizations are important to your advisory board and should have representation from departments related to your industry and be involved in the dual enrollment process for your students. These partners can offer advice about curriculum development, particularly in technical courses. They can assist in providing clarity about requirements for enrollment and may provide postsecondary courses that students can enroll in while in high school. They can also introduce staff to other sources of information related to the industry and potential 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 enrollment requirements.

### **Step 11: Consider Entities, Not Individuals, as Potential Partners**

Change happens. Individuals are transferred, get new responsibilities, or even transition into different organizations. As such, individual partners within each entity may vary from year to year. However, when the entity (i.e., the organization or postsecondary institution) is considered part of the advisory board, lasting partnerships are far more likely.

As you recruit partners for your advisory board, suggest that they designate a substitute from their organization who can attend meetings if the current representative assumes a different role or leaves the organization.

### **Step 12: Respond to Partner Concerns**

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

Develop an open and ongoing process for answering questions and dealing with uncertainty and problems. Deal with questions and concerns immediately. As often as possible, have written guidelines for involving students to alleviate any uncertainty that a partner may have.

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

### **Step 13: Publicize Partner Activities**

Partners agree to serve on the advisory board and hire students for many reasons. These include wanting to assist young people to succeed, recruit young people to enter the industry, give back to the community, or contribute to the needs of the workforce. Below are some examples.

- Provide your partners with positive publicity about the support they are giving you and your students. While maintaining strong relationships with individuals, this also encourages other employees to volunteer. It enhances the company's 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 newsletters 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 as well.
- 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 can be great content for them. These stories provide human interest, showing students interacting with industry representatives and giving your partners recognition within the community.
- 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 new partners.

#### Step 14: Continually Expand Partner Contacts

Change is inevitable. 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 its 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 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:

- Nominate your employer partner to be recognized as a Tennessee Flagship Industry Partner.
- Conduct an end-of-year celebration.
- Award a formal certificate of appreciation or a plaque.
- Send thank you letters from students following a field trip.
- Spotlight an employer offering WBL experiences for students on your website.
- Thank your partners for every activity they provide.

Provide opportunities for your partners to learn about student success. The goal is to use WBL to guide your students to graduation, postsecondary education, and successful careers. The greatest compliment you can give to your partners is to use the information they provide. Value what your partners recommend, offer assistance, and report back after an action step is completed. When partners know that you respect their opinions and ideas, they feel like a vital part of student achievement and success.