

Principles for Sustaining Employer Partnerships

(A quick checklist)

1. **Individualize.** Involve them in the way most appropriate for the particular organization. There are lots of roles partners can play: advisory board members, speakers, field trip hosts, mentors, internship supervisors, teacher externship coordinators, curriculum advisors, liaisons to other employers. Match your needs with their resources.
2. **Establish communication channels.** Identify specific points of contact for the partners and high school so there is an established channel of communication to plan activities and work out problems. Partners often become frustrated that they can't find anyone to talk to at a high school. Personal relationships help. So does email.
3. **Value their time.** Where meetings are involved, have an agenda and time limit and stick to them. Identify needed actions and next steps. Partners often complain about the lack of focus and time urgency in school meetings.
4. **Give them jobs.** They are task-oriented people. Their strongest motivator is the sense they are contributing. Make the jobs appropriate to their skills and time availability, but expect them to do things for the program and the students.
5. **Treat them as colleagues.** Teachers are sometimes awed by business people, or contrastingly, quietly disdainful of them. They're just people, working in a different industry. Ask them questions. Learn from their expertise and share yours. Work with them as fellow professionals.
6. **Expose them to students.** Many industry volunteers are people who love kids and may even have wanted to be a teacher (or perhaps were in the past). Their primary motivation is often to help kids. Structure activities so they have contact with students.
7. **Expect change.** Be adaptable. Partners experience staff turnovers and industry adjustments, sometimes at an alarming rate. The people you work with may leave; the company's resources may change. Nothing is permanent. But often you can make adjustments and sustain partnerships.
8. **Anticipate trends.** Read about developments in your career field, learn what jobs are growing and shrinking. Stay ahead of the curve. This helps you to locate new partners to work with and adapt to changes in current ones.
9. **Say thank you.** There are many ways to do this: thank you notes (especially from students), food, recognition at program events, certificates, social events, and publicity for the company.