Employer Engagement and Recruitment
A Quick Guide to effective practice
Overview

This guide is designed to help leadership and staff, including work-based learning coordinators, job developers and others from schools, community organizations and/or intermediary partners effectively recruit and engage a range of employers to provide work-based learning opportunities for students or young adults, and to support activities in the classroom. It recognizes that not all employers can provide the same levels of commitment to or involvement in a particular program or initiative, but that any employer can be engaged in one or more activities if the experience is designed and supported with employer capacity in mind. It also recognizes that employer engagement is not just one person in the organization's job, but takes a concerted effort of staff and partners across the entire organization or initiative.

This guide is a companion to the New Ways Work-Based Learning Toolkit, which provides detail on the overall approach to work-based learning and definitions of the full range of work-based learning activities provided for students or young adults over the course of their engagement with particular program. It also provides tip sheets, fact sheets and tools to support each experience. All individuals on the employer engagement team should be familiar with the toolkit—in particular the elements designed to support employer participation.

This guide is focused on framing and building capacity at two levels. The first level, described in Section One of the Quick Guide, is focused on the strategies your organization and partners can apply to effectively recruit and fully engage employers. Whether you represent a school, community-based organization or intermediary that is committed to making and managing the employer connections for your school or program, paying attention to and addressing each of the *Five Organizational Strategies* described below can greatly improve your employer recruitment and engagement capacity.

The second level, described in Section Two of this Quick Guide, focuses on activities that *individuals* conducting engagement activities can use to build their own personal capacity related to recruiting employers. By applying some basic marketing and sales strategies and approaches drawn from the private sector, all of those involved in employer recruitment, engagement and support can benefit from being aware of and applying the *Four Simple Steps* described in this section.

As the call for expanded work-based learning opportunities grows, it is important to shift from an individual approach to the employer recruitment, engagement and support process to one that can be embedded in a local system, with responsibilities spread among a number of individuals at the schools, community based organizations, community colleges and intermediary partners. The intent of this guide is to help improve employer engagement capacity of both individuals and organizations now, and lay a foundation for a broader local engagement effort in the future

Effective Employer Engagement
Five Key Organizational Strategies

What can schools, community organizations and/or intermediary partners do to effectively engage employers?

Employers can play a number of critical roles in an effective community-based program or school. They can serve as design partners, inform curriculum or training, support activities in the classroom and provide a wide range of work-based learning activities for students or young adults. It's important for the organization's entire team to be engaged in the employer engagement process and to view employers as customers as well as partners. Generally, organizations that do a good job of engaging employers and community partners in their work share five common quality characteristics. By addressing each of the following five strategies, schools, community organizations and/or intermediary partners can broaden and sustain employer participation beyond their core employer base.

EFFECTIVE EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT
5 KEY ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

Addressing each of the Five Organizational Strategies described below can greatly improve employer recruitment and engagement capacity.

PROMOTE CUSTOMER SERVICE
Practice professionalism
Focus on marketing and sales
Support employer participation
Provide a range of options
Sustain involvement

TARGET RESOURCES
Dedicate staff
Train as "engagement specialists"
Budget resources to support marketing
Create targeted outreach materials
Utilize data management tools

VIEW EMPLOYERS AS BOTH PARTNERS AND CUSTOMERS
Prioritize employer engagement
Research the local labor market
Focus on employer benefits and needs
Cultivate long-term relationships
Value all levels of involvement
Define value proposition

FOCUS ON OUTCOMES
Set goals
Measure effectiveness
Use customer satisfaction surveys
Assess and evaluate effectiveness
Foster continuous improvement

APPLY A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
Utilize a detailed marketing plan
Promote effective communication
Define and document agreements
Leverage the work of others
Connect to broad efforts

Effective Employer Engagement Organizations view employers as both **partners and customers,** promote **customer service**, **target resources** for the engagement effort, apply a **comprehensive strategy** and focus on **outcomes.**

STRATEGY 1 - View Employers as Both Partners and Customers

Effective organizations define employers and community partners[1] as primary customers in addition to the students or young adults they serve. They prioritize employer engagement and recruitment as a core and necessary function. Resources, staffing and organizational decisions reflect this dual-customer approach.

To build the employer relationship, organizations:

- ✓ Prioritize employer engagement within the organization
- ✓ Research the labor market and become familiar with regional needs and trends
- ✓ Focus on employer benefits and address employer needs and motivations
- ✓ Define the value proposition and focus on win/win opportunities
- ✓ Value any and all levels of involvement
- ✓ Cultivate long-term relationships with employers

STRATEGY 2 - Promote Customer Service

Effective organizations actively promote and practice customer service and demonstrate a sales and customer service orientation when interacting with employers. Staff and partners who interact with employers pay attention to understanding and addressing employers' needs, and the approach is embedded in the program or school culture.

To promote customer service, organizations:

- ✓ Maintain a professional environment and approach
- ✓ Train staff and promote a marketing, sales and customer service culture
- ✓ Support employer volunteers and hosts, including frontline supervisors
- ✓ Provide a range of participation options and easy and comfortable ways to participate
- ✓ Find ways to support and sustain employer involvement

STRATEGY 3 - Target Resources

Effective organizations identify, leverage and target effort and resources, both human and capital, to support their employer engagement activities. Strategies, resources and people's time are assigned to support a range of marketing, sales, service, support and evaluation functions.

To target resources, organizations:

- ✓ Dedicate staff to the engagement effort
- ✓ Train and support staff and partners as "engagement specialists"
- ✓ Budget resources and leverage partner contributions to specifically support marketing and other activities
- ✓ Create materials specifically targeted to the employer audience
- ✓ Utilize effective data management tools and processes

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[1] Employers and community partners include the full range of potential partners outside of your program or school that can participate in program activities, serve on advisory boards, and/or provide work-based experiences for youth. They include large and small employers in your target industry, but also may include labor organizations, corporations, non-profit organizations, government, and a range of other public and private institutions.

STRATEGY 4 - Apply a Comprehensive Approach

Effective organizations and their partners apply a comprehensive and connected approach to help guide their employer engagement and recruitment work. They apply clear and detailed marketing plans and follow benchmarked timelines. They work closely with other educational and workforce initiatives[2] seeking to connect with and engage employers, and are formally connected to a larger, broader system.

To apply a comprehensive approach, organizations:
- ✓ Ensure engagement activities are driven by a detailed marketing plan
- ✓ Promote effective communication between all parties
- ✓ Document agreements through formal MOUs
- ✓ Connect to and leverage the work of others
- ✓ Participate in wider employer engagement initiatives (beyond their own program)

STRATEGY 5 - Focus on Outcomes

Effective organizations and their partners apply continuous improvement practices to gauge the effectiveness of their employer engagement and recruitment efforts and guide their work. Schools and partners are focused on outcomes, and use a variety of measures to evaluate and improve their practice.

To focus on outcomes, organizations:

- ✓ Set measurable goals and celebrate success
- ✓ Measure the effectiveness of the engagement effort
- ✓ Use customer satisfaction surveys to improve performance
- ✓ Conduct regular organizational assessments and evaluations
- ✓ Practice continuous improvement

Your school, community organization or intermediary and your employer engagement partners can expand their capacity to recruit and engage employers by paying attention to these five key strategies. A self-assessment that can help you identify your progress in each of these areas and develop plans for improvement is provided in Section 3 of this guide.

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[2] These initiatives include Community Colleges, Economic Development Organizations. Career Pathway and CTE Programs, Chambers of Commerce, Academy programs, Trade Associations, the Workforce Development System, Workforce Intermediaries and others.

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Effective Employer Engagement Practices
Four Simple Steps for Work-Based Learning Coordinators, Youth Program Account Managers and Employer Engagement Staff

Introduction
Engaging and recruiting employers is critical to the success and sustainability of successful career pathway and youth workforce development programs. Potential employer partners come in a range of forms and varying capacities to connect to and participate with your program, school or organization—and *all* of their commitments and contributions are important. While schools and youth programs need employers to participate in a wide range of activities, including serving on an advisory board, offering a range of classroom supports for teachers or instructors and providing work-based learning opportunities for students and young adults, not all employers need to participate in every activity. Each employer has something unique to contribute to your school or program. This quick guide is intended to help employer engagement staff identify, recruit and engage a wide range of employers with their school, career pathway or youth program.

As described in the first section of this quick guide, the employer engagement effort requires focus, a shift in the way programs and schools think about employers and the application leveraged, and dedicated resources. Your organization or school should be creative in how you organize and support the employer engagement effort. Consider partnering with other organizations or school-based programs involved in developing work-based learning opportunities in a coordinated engagement effort. These organizations are not your competition; they are potential partners in the work. Within your organization, leverage your team members, employer partners, parents, students and participating young adults. They all have connections to potential employer partners and can help create warm leads for the engagement effort. Business partners, intermediary organizations and others may be positioned to help you with the employer engagement process. Look to partner with an intermediary focused on brokering connections between groups of employers and schools and organizations. They can be particularly helpful in supporting your employer recruitment activities and helping you sustain employer involvement. You have many tools to work with and people on your team and in your community to help make it happen. Business partners, intermediary organizations and others may be positioned to help you with the employer engagement process.

There are **four simple steps**—borrowed from quality practices applied by successful marketing and sales professionals—that can help increase your capacity to successfully engage employers, labor, government, community organizations and others to support your efforts and provide opportunities in the workplace for students and young adults.

STEP 1 - Be Prepared
- Get to know everything you can about the local economy and the industries upon which your school or program is focused, and research the labor market to become familiar with local industry trends and forecasts. All industries offer partnership

opportunities and can participate in activities that will benefit your school or program and the young people you serve.

- Identify those employers that are active in the community, and others that have the potential to be involved with your school or program.
- Define the services your school or program will provide to support broad employer engagement in the full range of participation options. Remember, employers are customers and as such need specialized support to maximize their participation.
- Define and be conversant with the employer benefits associated with partnering with your school or program or providing opportunities for students or young adults.
- Define the potential value and benefit of having your students or youth program members engaged with employers—in both the short and long term.
- Get to know the number, skills, interests and availability of your students or young adults and when they will be ready for particular experiences. This will help you target and sequence your engagement efforts and effectively match students to appropriate opportunities.
- Identify internal, partner and external resources for the employer engagement and recruitment effort.
- Consider the fact that students or young adults themselves can be effective recruiters, and help them get prepared to help you connect with potential employers.

STEP 2 - Make a Plan and Stick to It!
- Create and follow a marketing plan and activities schedule to guide your employer engagement and recruitment effort. Include the following components:
  - ✓ State your purpose, goals and objectives to help keep you focused and on track with your plan.
  - ✓ Start with your core partners and further define your customer base in order to focus on new potential partners who are likely to be receptive to your message.
  - ✓ Qualify the market, paying attention to potential partners beyond your current base of employers. Target industries with projected growth and/or future labor force needs and individual employers likely to become engaged with your program.
  - ✓ Find out about those employers that have current or prior involvement with education, workforce development and/or community-based activities and add them to your prospect list.
  - ✓ Create key messages to ensure consistency and clarity in your marketing and recruitment. Create and hone your elevator pitch.
  - ✓ Plan and outline your marketing strategies, including a steady balance among the following activity areas:
    - o General Awareness - press coverage, media campaigns, events and newsletters.
    - o Targeted Marketing - mailings, phone campaigns and networking.
    - o Direct Recruiting - presentations at meetings, in person and at job fairs or industry events.
- Create a detailed activities calendar to help organize your marketing and sales activities.

STEP 3 - Market and Promote Your Program

- Start with your core partners, and work with intermediaries and others to build a solid foundation and grow your employer engagement activities from there. Consider a small campaign to recruit new employers. Identify prospects from your existing employer partners, advisory board members, staff and others.
- Highlight the fact that your program is designed specifically to address defined employer needs and help support future workforce development.
- Focus on customer service, and ensure that you are able to address the unique needs, interests and circumstances of each prospective employer partner.
- Network in multiple circles to raise awareness of your program and to develop relationships with a wide range of potential employer partners.
- Prepare a sales presentation to address the short- and long-term needs and concerns of prospective employers.
- Focus on the win/win, high-value proposition associated with working with you. Your audience wants to know, "What's in it for me?"
- Get to Yes. Leave a meeting or presentation with a clear and stated commitment to the next step.
- Close the deal by understanding your potential partner's motivation, and be ready to value all participation commitments. If you are looking for career mentors and end up with a guest speaker, celebrate!

STEP 4 - Deliver Flawless Follow-Up

- Become a primary resource for information and problem solving, even if not directly related to something that your school or program can provide. Become aware of resources in the community and connect employers to others who can address their needs and interests. Be their go-to connection to your community's education and workforce systems.
- Support the ongoing participation of your partners by making sure that their needs and expectations are being met.
- Deliver on promises. Your employers need to be able to count on you.
- Measure results and share information to guide decisions and engage your partners in making improvements.
- Stay in regular contact to ensure satisfaction and develop lasting relationships.

Finally, it's important that you get comfortable seeing yourself as a marketing and sales professional in this aspect of your school or program's work. As you increase your ability to address the needs and interests of potential and existing employer partners, you will be able to provide more opportunities for the students and young adults you serve, and increase support and involvement in your program overall.

For markeing and sales tools and resouces, please visit our resource library at
www.newwaystowork.org

This self-assessment is part of a set of tools designed to help schools, community-based organizations and intermediary partners increase their employer engagement and recruitment capacity. It is designed to help ground your engagement team and help implement an employer engagement system that will sustain and grow employer involvement with your organization over time. Through the self-assessment process, you and your team members will identify current progress, document success, help prioritize activities and plan for improvements.

Completing the **Organizational Strategies Self-Assessment** will help your team identify current strengths and weaknesses, and prioritize areas to address in the future. Increasing capacity to effectively engage employers allows you to enhance the number and quality of authentic workplace learning opportunities available for the students you serve, and the number of employers and community partners that are directly engaged in and contributing to your work.

Instructions:

- **Progress**: Ask each team member to individually complete the progress section of the self-assessment. For each indicator or statement, each team member rates progress using the following scale:

  ○ = Not on the radar ◔ = Just getting started ◕= Pretty well along in practice ● = Fully developed

- **Evidence-Based Discussion:** Ask all team members to post their responses on a large, wall-sized version of the self-assessment (with sticky dots or by making tick marks). Discuss the group's responses, especially where there are wide differences of opinion on stage of development. In that case, ask team members to cite the evidence that backs up their choice.

- **Priorities:** Once the team has reached general agreement on the current stage of development for each item, ask each team member to complete the priority section of the self-assessment in the context of a discreet timeframe (e.g. the next 12 months). It is helpful to limit the number of high-priority activities and to force the identification of lows in each section.

- **Actions:** Again, ask all team members to post their responses on the wall chart and discuss. As a group, identify priority actions for inclusion in the workplan.

After completing this assessment, teams can transfer the priority objectives to a formal workplan, and identify tactics, strategies and timelines that address those priorities

Strategy 1. View Employers as Both Partners and Customers	Progress	Evidence	Priority
Effective organizations define employers and community partners[1] as primary customers in addition to the students or young adults they serve. They prioritize employer engagement and recruitment as a core and necessary function. Resources, staffing and organizational decisions reflect this dual-customer approach.			
✓ Employer engagement is a stated priority within the organization	○ ◔ ● ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Labor market research guides work and team members are familiar with regional needs and trends	○ ◔ ● ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Engagement efforts focus on employer benefits and address employer needs and motivations	○ ◔ ● ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Team members have defined the value proposition and are focused on win/win opportunities	○ ◔ ● ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Team members and leaders value any and all levels of employer involvement	○ ◔ ● ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ The organization cultivates long term relationships with employers	○ ◔ ● ●		▬ ■ ■

[1] Employers and community partners include the full range of potential partners outside of your program or school that can participate in program activities, serve on advisory boards, and/or provide work-based experiences for youth. They include large and small employers in your target industry, but also may include labor organizations, corporations, non-profit organizations, government, and a range of other public and private institutions.

KEY: ○ = Not on the radar   ◔ = Just getting started   ● = Pretty well along in practice   ● = Fully developed – a core part of the work
Priority: ▬ = Low priority (force at least 1 low) ■ = Medium priority ▮ = High priority (limit 1 or 2 high priorities)

Strategy 2. Promote Customer Service Effective organizations actively promote and practice customer service and demonstrate a sales and customer service orientation when interacting with employers. Staff and partners who interact with employers pay attention to understanding and addressing employers' needs, and the approach is embedded in the program or school culture.	**Progress**	**Evidence**	**Priority**
✓ The organization maintains a professional environment and approach to employer engagement	○ ◑ ◐ ●		▬ ▪ ■
✓ All team members have been trained as "engagement specialists" and promote a marketing, sales and customer service culture	○ ◑ ◐ ●		▬ ▪ ■
✓ Employer partners and hosts, including frontline supervisors, are a focus and supported by the program	○ ◑ ◐ ●		▬ ▪ ■
✓ A full range of participation options are made available, and easy and comfortable ways for employers to participate have been defined	○ ◑ ◐ ●		▬ ▪ ■
✓ The program has developed and implemented a number of strategies to support and sustain employer involvement	○ ◑ ◐ ●		▬ ▪ ■

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Strategy 3. Target Resources Effective organizations identify, leverage and target effort and resources, both human and capital, to support their employer engagement activities. Strategies, resources and people's time are assigned to support a range of marketing, sales, service, support and evaluation functions.	Progress	Evidence	Priority
✓ Team members are identified, hired and dedicated to the engagement effort	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Team members and partners have been trained and are supported as "engagement specialists"	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Resources have been budgeted and leveraged partner contributions specifically support marketing and other engagement activities	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Materials specifically targeted to the employer audience have been created	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Effective data management tools and processes are in place and utilized by team members	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■

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Strategy 4. Apply a Comprehensive Approach	Progress	Evidence	Priority
Effective organizations and their partners apply a comprehensive and connected approach to help guide their employer engagement and recruitment work. They apply clear and detailed marketing plans and follow benchmarked timelines. They work closely with other educational and workforce initiatives[3] seeking to connect with and engage employers, and are formally connected to a larger, broader system..			
✓ Employer engagement activities are driven by a detailed marketing plan	○ ◑ ◕ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Effective communication strategies are in place and support communication among all engagement team members	○ ◑ ◕ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Formal MOUs and agreements document decisions and commitments	○ ◑ ◕ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ The engagement effort connects to and leverages other work	○ ◑ ◕ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ The organization participates in community-wide engagement efforts	○ ◑ ◕ ●		▬ ■ ■

[3] These initiatives include Community Colleges, Economic Development Organizations. Career Pathway and CTE Programs, Chambers of Commerce, Academy programs, Trade Associations, the Workforce Development System, Workforce Intermediaries and others.

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Strategy 5. Focus on Outcomes Effective organizations and their partners apply continuous improvement practices to gauge the effectiveness of their employer engagement and recruitment efforts and guide their work. Schools and partners are focused on outcomes, and use a variety of measures to evaluate and improve their practice.	**Progress**	**Evidence**	**Priority**
✓ The team sets measurable goals and celebrates success	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ The effectiveness of the engagement effort is measured	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Customer satisfaction surveys are used to improve performance	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ Regular organizational assessments and evaluations are conducted	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■
✓ The team regularly engages in continuous improvement practices	○ ◔ ◑ ●		▬ ■ ■

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Tools and Materials

1. **Employer Engagement Strategies Self-Assessment**
   A self-assessment that can help identify your progress in five key foundational strategies and develop plans for improvement. (also included as Section Three of the Employer Engagement Quick Guide)

2. **Marketing and Sales Sample Activities**
   Some sample activities to help you expand your capacity to reach new employers.

3. **The Perfect Pitch**
   A group exercise to help your team develop and hone an elevator pitch to promote engagement in your school or program.

4. **Sample Marketing Plan Template**