

**HFTFS PRIZE 2018**  
**APPLICATION PART 2**  
**READING #2**

**HARBOR FREIGHT**  
**TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS**

**Forging Stronger Ties With Business**

Adapted from “[Best Practices in K-12 Business Partnerships](#)”  
By Hanover Research, 2015

When establishing a Work-based Learning (WBL) program, educators should seek to align their program with labor market needs to prepare students for occupations in high-growth industries and equip them with skills relevant to the 21st century economy.

Schools must consider both their own needs and the needs of the market. Echoing the importance of this consideration, the Pennsylvania CTE Best Practices Initiative identifies two key questions that must be addressed when establishing business partnerships:

- Identify needs and opportunities for involvement: What do we need and how can business/industry help us?
- Evaluate business/industry environment and survey needs: Who are our local employers and what are their needs?

This discussion of alignment also allows schools to begin determining what types of WBL would both suit the needs of their students and appeal to businesses. The structural variety of WBL activities allows for a wide range of potential partnerships, and partners are free to contribute in unique ways. Companies that cannot agree to an ongoing commitment, for example, may be able to host one-time events for students, and companies unable

to invest money into an apprenticeship or internship program may be able to contribute their time through job shadowing and mentoring.

Once labor market needs have been identified and districts have selected their target industries, administrators should assess the potential offerings of business partners. Valuable information to research includes: the financial health of the business, the details of what the particular business does, information regarding their current community involvements if any, and causes in which the business already seems interested. This is also an opportunity to collect stakeholder opinions and consider any and all issues that could lead to community criticism regarding the relationship.

In addition to being a source of potential feedback, the wider school community also serves as a valuable resource when identifying and connecting with potential business partners. Many parents are also employees of local businesses, and there are business networking organizations in almost every city. Discussions with these individuals and groups may be helpful in forming connections and finding unexpected common interests. Once established, these relationships also prove useful when reaching out to businesses to initiate a partnership request, as internal contacts can help advocate for the utility of the relationship to their colleagues.

After potential partners are identified through an evaluation of labor market needs, district needs, and company research, school districts should begin formal outreach. In their “How-To Guide for School-Business Partnerships,” the Council of Corporate and School Partnerships states that it is “always helpful” to provide potential partners with a written proposal for consideration, adding that for larger companies, written proposals will most likely be required before serious discussions begin. Face-to-face meeting regarding the partnership should be requested only once this written proposal is successfully submitted.

Meetings with prospective partners are a time to discuss common institutional values, short- and long-term goals, expected outcomes, potential activities, and the impact of the partnership on student outcomes. Goals should be defined quantitatively whenever possible, since progress towards objective measures of success is easier to track. For WBL programs, for example, possible goals include an improvement in student retention rates, student graduation rates, student participation rates, and student academic achievement.

District attendees should be prepared to argue for both the fiscal and philanthropic value of their program, as some employers may need to be convinced of the value of WBL before accepting a program proposal. As one study in California has noted: “With respect to work-based learning, research has shown that additional marketing to employers is required, particularly marketing that includes ‘bottom-line’ arguments for participants,” and there is a need for “widespread conviction that work-based

learning has significant educational value for a large number of students.”

Accordingly, common employer benefits of WBL programs that can be marketed to potential partners include:

- A new pool of potential employees who will understand the needs and expectations of the workplace.
- An effective way to connect with local educators and provide opportunities for students.
- Improved employee morale through student workplace learning. (e.g., employees take pride in supervising a young person who in turn may improve their work performance).
- A way to provide a community service.

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