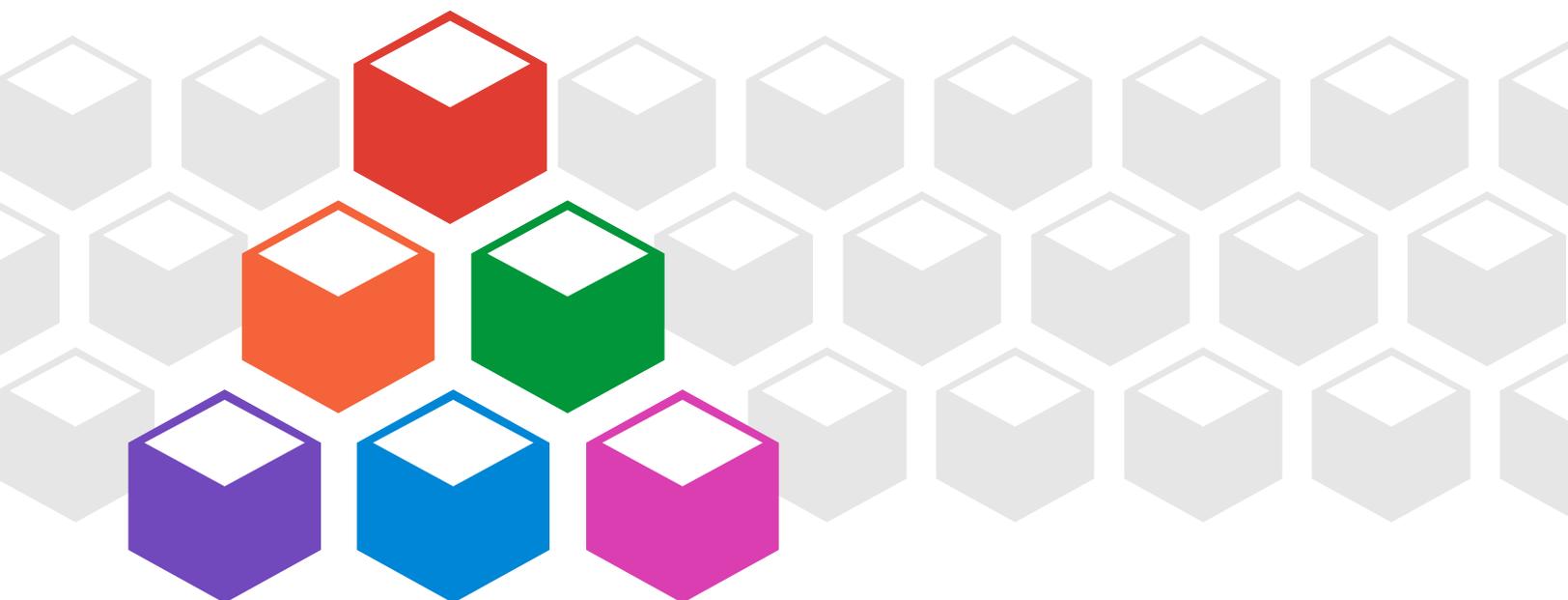




NTACT

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition



A Guide to Developing Collaborative School-Community- Business Partnerships

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I. Introduction to School-Community-Business Partnerships

Why are they important?

Youth development does not occur in a vacuum, nor can any one entity take on the full responsibility of helping students and youth¹ prepare for and pursue successful employment and careers. This is true of all youth. However, this notion is especially relevant to youth with disabilities who may find themselves interacting with multiple systems, entities and professionals at various times during their movement through secondary education and beyond.

It has long been held that collaboration among professionals and service systems is an important component of effective initiatives and programs that support the transition of youth with disabilities from school to work and adult life (Wehman, 2013). In fact, without clearly identified roles of, and coordination between, involved parties to this transition there are potential problems at two levels: the individual youth level where poor collaboration and poor application of disparate resources may exacerbate an already complicated path to adult employment; and the larger systems and partner level where resources might not be used to maximum effect or, at worst, misapplied, so that the desired outcomes are far less than desired. To put it another way, beneficial outcomes both at the individual youth level and at the larger systems level can be best expected through the most coordinated application of resources and effort.

In fact, there is recent research that suggests that not only is collaboration important, but under the right conditions it can lead to desired outcomes for youth with disabilities in transition from school to careers and adult life. When collaboration is directly focused on outcomes for youth and the systems that serve them – rather than merely referring them for a “hand off” to the next responsible party – higher school completion and employment rates are likely (Fabian & Luecking, 2015).

In addition to the teachers and education professionals who have an obvious and direct role with youth with disabilities, others among the long list of potential collaborators in student/youth transition and student/youth employment are: vocational rehabilitation, youth service organizations, employment service agencies, government sponsored disability employment services, the workforce investment system, and other community organizations and services.

¹ “Student and youth” is terminology used in the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act when referencing individuals eligible for vocational rehabilitation services who are preparing for the transition to post-school adult employment. To simplify reading, this Guide most often uses “youth,” or “youth with disabilities,” to refer to these and any individuals with disabilities preparing for or making that transition.

Further, at the top of the list of important influencers of youth development are employers. After all, employment should be the ultimate goal for youth with disabilities in transition. And finally, essential to the process, but often underappreciated, if not inadvertently excluded, are the individual youth and the families of these youth. This Guide is designed to provide basic information to enable meaningful and outcome oriented collaboration among all of these potential partners.

How this Guide will help

The “gold standard” of youth outcomes is when they are achieving employment and pursuing a clear career path. The activities transition and employment initiatives, and the partnerships that support them, are most appropriately judged against this standard. This Guide presents approaches and considerations for the development and implementation of broadly inclusive partnerships that strive for this standard. We are calling them School-Community-Business partnerships. This designation recognizes that in addition to schools and their business partners playing essential roles, a host of other partners from the community will be also be important to youth success.

The strategies and perspectives presented here are based on approaches to partnerships that we have observed in action, learned from a variety of effective practitioners and professional partners, and gleaned from relevant research. These strategies may suggest adjustments in how local collaborating systems have typically operated. The intention is that schools, businesses and employers², vocational rehabilitation, government agencies, youth services, disability employment programs, families, youth and any involved partner will jointly realize that process-oriented “meetings to meet” are no measure of collaboration and are certainly no measure of progress. Rather, we should be ultimately counting how many students exit school with jobs and a clear career path.

The Guide covers important considerations for implementing an effective collaborative process for both individual and systems level outcomes. Thus, the Guide will focus on useful approaches, policies, and strategies necessary to facilitate partnerships that result in better outcomes for students and youth with disabilities and tangible mutual benefits for collaborating partners.

² For the purposes of this Guide, the terms “business” and “employer” are used interchangeably to refer to any entity that might host youth in authentic workplaces. Hence, private and public sector entities, large and small, are included when using these terms.

II. Setting the Stage for School-Community-Business Partnerships

Partnerships for What?

A job and a clear career path. Simply stated, this is it. School-Community-Business partnerships, at their best, lead to this outcome for the community's youth. Throughout the career preparation process there are many ways such partnerships are useful, even essential. These partnerships can ease the way for youth with disabilities to develop self-knowledge, explore career options, develop skills and experience, plan for careers, and ultimately begin a career.

A critical aspect of career development for youth with disabilities is early and ongoing work experience. Work experience has been consistently identified as the most important predictor of post school employment success for students youth with disabilities (Carter et al., 2012; Fabian 2007; Test et al., 2009;). Work experiences are useful in all phases of career development and can take different forms. The most common types are listed below with a brief description of each one (Luecking, 2009):

Career exposure: these include activities such as company tours/field trips, conversations with employers for the purpose of initial exposure to jobs and careers.

Job shadowing: this includes disability mentoring days and other teacher arranged opportunities where students "shadow" an employee in their work environment to get an idea of what is involved in their specific job.

Work sampling: this includes job task sampling, career assessments, or any unpaid work experience in the community for the purpose of exposure to different work environments or identification of potential supports or accommodations.

Service learning: this is formal volunteer service in a structured community service program for the purpose of contributing to the community, learning soft skills including follow through on commitments and taking directions in a community environment.

Internships: these include paid or unpaid student cooperative experience that combine classroom based education with practical work experience, formal time-limited work experience paired with course of study or an informal arrangement with an employer to learn identified work skills for the purpose of in-depth exposure to a job or workplace.

Apprenticeships: these include trade-related paid or unpaid work with a certified skilled journeyman to build occupational skills related to trade certification.

Paid employment: this includes part time or full time jobs where the youth earns a wage and that may or may not be related to course of study.

All of these experiences are potentially powerful learning tools, especially when they occur in authentic workplaces where students and youth can build work skills, learn appropriate work behaviors, identify the types of supports and accommodations they may need, and identify a career path.

Some of these types of work experiences, such as job shadowing, service learning and work sampling are unpaid, that is, the youth does not earn money during the activity. Others, such as internships, can be either paid or unpaid. And, of course, paid employment is just what it implies – students and youth are fairly compensated for their work. There are rules governing the conditions and circumstances under which youth do not need to be compensated and when and how they must be paid. It is useful for those involved in promoting any of these types of work experiences to be aware of these conditions and circumstances. A helpful reference in this regard is provided in the **Resources** section of this Guide.

Identifying the workplaces for these experiences of course requires engaging employers and business partners who agree to open their workplaces for this purpose. Preparing, developing, and supporting student and youth participation in any of these types of work experiences often also require an array of other partners. Who these partners are, what their roles are, and how to get them together will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Planning to Get There

At the individual level, the career direction of youth is the centerpiece. What gives direction to individual career pursuit? The Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act (IDEIA), the Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA) and state legislation each require that a plan be developed to assist students and youth with disabilities in bringing together information gathered through assessment and exploration to identify career goals and outcomes they wish to achieve. While the activities laid out in each law are designed to support students and youth reach their career goals, each one has specific requirements that often lead to multiple plans that are not aligned and that may or may not have similar goals. Well functioning School-Community-Partnerships coordinate time, effort, and resources so that individual career goals are achieved.

Individualized plans are both documents AND processes that students with disabilities use to define their career goals and postsecondary plans in order to inform the student's decisions about their courses and activities throughout high school. Common areas that align across agency requirements include consideration of a student's a) assessment and student identification of career goals, (b) work based learning experiences to develop skills necessary to reach career goals, (c)

course taking and postsecondary plans aligned to career goals, and (d) documentation of the range of college and career readiness skills he/she has developed. Thus, effective planning processes enhance a student's with disabilities understanding of the relevance of school courses, as well as out-of-school learning opportunities, and provide the student access to, career development opportunities that incorporate self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning and management skill building activities (Solberg et al., 2013)

Focus on Youth

Research and professional consensus point to the importance of youth empowerment in career development (NCWD/Youth, 2005). That is, youth with disabilities should not only be directly involved in transition and career planning, but they should have opportunities for input and decision making. In fact, there is considerable evidence that shows the benefit of student involvement in their Individual Educational Plan and other learning and career development planning (Solberg et al, 2013; Wehmeyer & Webb, 2012). Finally, The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center has identified three research-based practices that have been used to help students become more involved in, as well as lead their IEP meetings. These include the *Self-Advocacy Strategy* (Van Reusen, Bos, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1994), the *Self-Directed IEP*(Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman , 1996), and *Whose Future is it Anyway?*(Wehmeyer, Lawrence, Garner, Soukup, & Palmer, 2004) curricula. Research to practice lesson plan starters for these materials can be found at: <http://www.nsttac.org/content/student-focused-planning-0>

Here are some considerations to keep in mind to make sure youth are empowered to drive career development and to insure that School-Community-Business partnerships pursue activities and make decisions with youth, rather than simply for students and youth:

- Include youth (and their families) in any meeting about them and support their full participation in decisions that are made
- Encourage youth to provide information that reflects their interests, talents, positive traits, and need for accommodation and support
- Be sensitive to youths' decisions about whether, when, how, and to whom to disclose their disability. (See *411 on Disability Disclosure* in **Additional Resources** section on page 29.)

Many youth will not have sufficient exposure to experiences that inform choice making. In these cases, School-Community-Business partnerships will be invaluable in creating and supporting an array of work experiences for student and youth. Future decision making about employment and career directions will thus be increasingly facilitated by these experiences.

With aligned planning documents and processes, and with youth as the focus and the driver, partners in career development have a framework to organize themselves according to student and youth goals, preferences, and needs. The next step is to set the stage for the development of long term relationships with key partners, employers chief among them, as a means to cultivate work experience opportunities and paid employment. These relationships will drive the shape of the youth work experiences in their myriad forms.

III. Forming School-Community-Business Partnerships

What's In It for Me?

Ideal and effective partnerships are characterized by a mutually supportive relationship between partners in which all parties commit to a specific goal and in which all partners achieve some benefit. Forming a partnership involves specific preparation, implementation, and evaluation in order to be successful. This section discusses getting the partnership started.

What might be in it for each partner? What's to be gained? How can it be held together over time? It is a long established maxim that partnerships are formed and sustained only when each partner benefits. Although it may be clear to all partners that improving employment success for the community's students and youth with disabilities is a common goal, each has something distinct to gain if the partnership is operating well. Schools, for example, may find it easier to meet special education law requirements through well designed partnerships. Businesses may gain opportunities for preparing the future workforce. Government sponsored agencies may more readily meet their mandates for service outcomes. Essentially, through well- formed and operated partnerships, each partner has something to gain by working- together on behalf of youth with disabilities.

One additional note on partner composition: successful partnerships do not necessarily include all the possible partners. That is, membership from community to community may contain various compositions of possible partners, based on the community's specific circumstances and partnership goals. Table 1 lists common partners, but not necessarily all possible partners, in youth transition and employment initiatives. It also summarizes what each might gain from partnering in such initiatives.

Table 1 Partners and Benefits	
Partner	Potential Partnership Benefits
Secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved transition planning (Indicator 13)* • Improved post school outcome reports (Indicator 14)* • Improved graduation rates (Indicator 1)* • Decreased drop-out rates (Indicator 2)* • Increased college and career readiness rates • Enhancements to curriculum
Postsecondary education and training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancements to courses of study • Improved degree/certificate completion rates • Increased enrollment of students with disabilities
Businesses and employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet current workforce needs • Better prepared future workforce • Improved community engagement • Increase workforce diversity and inclusion
Vocational Rehabilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services for students and youth with disabilities • Increased successful rehabilitation case closures • Maximization of fiscal and program resources
Jobs Centers (also known as One-Stop Career Centers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved performance outcomes for in-school and out-of-school youth participants • Improved performance outcomes for adult intensive services
Adult and youth employment programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher placement rates • Work readiness or occupational skills attainment • Credential attainment • More funding support due to higher placement rates
State government agencies serving youth and adults with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved outcomes • Maximization of fiscal and program resources

* Indicators 1, 2, 13 and 14” are requirements for monitoring the transition components of the special education law (IDEIA, 2004). Indicator 1 is the percent of youth with IEP’s graduating from high school with a regular diploma in four years; Indicator 2 is the percent of youth with IEP’s dropping out of high school; Indicator 13 applies to transition planning for post-secondary goals; and Indicator 14 monitors employment and post-secondary education enrollment of youth one year after school exit.

Although the partners listed in the above table are the most common in assisting students and youth pursue work experiences and employment, other possible partners include programs specific to various populations of youth, such as mental health programs and services, intellectual and developmental disabilities agencies, juvenile justice programs, blind and visually impaired services, deaf services, and others. In addition, there may be value in some communities to include housing programs, public income support programs such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and social service programs. The involvement of these entities in School-Community-Business partnerships will be dictated by the needs of local communities and the goals of the partnerships. In any case, the concept of identifying benefits for each participating partner still applies.

Convening the Partners

Who should pull the partnership together? Who insures its sustainability? Recognizing that under the circumstances of a well-functioning School-Community-Business partnership all participating partners have something to gain, it is logical that leadership can come from any of the partners. As a practical matter, it is often the partner who has the most to gain and/or who has an immediate compelling reason to get things started.

Frequently, but not always, school systems take on a leadership role in convening the partners because they have a statutory need to improve outcomes for transitioning students with disabilities, that is, they have an obligation to comply with special education law Indicators. Local Education Agency (LEA) special education or career preparation programs may therefore focus on developing partnerships for the purposes of providing work experiences while students with disabilities are still in school and/or linkages to ongoing services and supports that are projected to be important as the student exits school.

In some cases, a business interest or need, such as investment in future workforce development or increasing community participation, may result in an employer-led entity initiating and leading a School-Community-Business partnership. Under this scenario a Chamber of Commerce or a Business Leadership Network may initiate a partnership and take on the leadership role.

Occasionally, community organizations or employment service providers seeking improved outcomes for youth with disabilities through enhanced community networking develop partnerships as a way of achieving this. In fact, a representative of any community entity can lead the convening of School-Community-Business partners, as long as they understand the potential benefits that can accrue to all partners.

Another option that may exist for convening and leading the partnership is a neutral or designated convener to initiate and manage a partnership. Such entities are often called *intermediaries*. An intermediary “is an organization which seeks to assist the

two key customers of the workforce system – job seekers and employers, through coordination and collaboration among and between myriad agencies and providers that impact service delivery” (Mooney & Luecking, 2006). One example of an intermediary would be a non-profit community-based organization which is active in community activities but is not a direct provider of service to the community’s students and youth with disabilities, thus maintaining a neutral role in facilitating the activities of the partnership. Other potential intermediaries include Chambers of Commerce, Workforce Investment Boards, Mayors’ offices, United Way, or any organization that has already built strong community ties and had the capacity to engage the desired partners who potential have a mutual interest in a School-Community-Business partnership. Intermediaries are not essential to School-Community-Business partnerships, but can be an indispensable ingredient under the circumstances where partnership leadership is unclear or where it is most expedient for a neutral entity to manage the relationships and activities of diverse partners.

Regardless of affiliation, the leader identifies and brings partners together, organizes and establishes the meeting structure and frequency, and is the primary communicator among all partners. Regardless of who assumes leadership, these are the key responsibilities and activities of School-Community-Business partnership leaders:

- Establishes the meeting agendas. Often it is useful to establish standard agenda items to maintain consistent focus from meeting to meeting.
- Facilitates meeting discussions and maintains focus so as to follow the agenda.
- Sets the tone so all team members are comfortable making contributions to discussions and the activities of the partnership.
- Insures that note taking responsibilities are assigned and minutes are kept and distributed following each meeting.
- Insures that agreed upon action items are carried out.
- Represents the partnership to external groups and entities.
- Ensure clear roles for all partners are established.

Who Does What?

The table below (Table 2) summarizes common partners in School-Community-Business partnerships and the roles they might play in partnership activities.

Table 2 School-Community-Business Partners and Roles	
Partner	Potential Roles (Outside of leadership which can be assumed by any partner)
Secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer students to programs or activities promoted by partnership • Insure relevance of partnership activities to student educational goals, that is help students connect what they learn from work experiences back to their course work • Help students use what they learn from work experiences to inform the transition components of their IEP
Vocational rehabilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorize and facilitate case services for job development and job coaching for eligible students and youth • Authorize and facilitate case services for other accommodations and supports needed for eligible youth to find and succeed in work experiences and jobs
Postsecondary education and training programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer students to programs or activities promoted by partnership • Link students' participation to course of study
Businesses and employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advice to educational partners about educational curriculum • Provide work experience opportunities • Provide employment opportunities • Network with other businesses/employers
Jobs Centers (also known as One-Stop Career Centers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate access to youth employment and/or generic workforce investment services • Facilitate connections to applicable Jobs Centers
Adult and youth employment programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide job development and job coaching
State government agencies serving students, youth and adults with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate access to programs for which youth are eligible that support employment development • Provide funding support when service eligibility is established
Intermediary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neutral convener of all parties • Facilitate partner collaboration

**Case Example 1:
School-Community-Business Partnerships Working for Individual Youth**

In an effort to create an increased number of work experiences for transitioning youth with disabilities, a local education agency (LEA) in Iowa convened a School-Community-Business partnership. In addition to high school personnel, the Principal contacted representatives from the vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency, local workforce agency, community college, community agencies that serve adults with disabilities, and employer representatives to participate. The group met monthly to discuss how they could maximize the resources of each partner to best serve youth with disabilities. Partnership activities included identifying appropriate work based experiences and paid job opportunities that filled an employer need and matched a particular student's interest.

One example is Caleb, an 18-year-old student with a disability who in his senior year of high school ran into barriers to achieving his career goal. Caleb had participated in career exploration activities during his sophomore and junior years and had identified an interest in welding. He had completed industrial education classes while in high school and was planning on attending a certificate program in welding at the local community college upon graduation. After visiting the local community college and understanding the academic requirements of the program, Caleb determined that he would have difficulty completing the full welding certificate program. He was disappointed that he might not be able to achieve his dream of becoming a welder.

Caleb informed his VR Counselor who told him there may be other options to becoming a welder. She met with partnership members who identified a local welding company that may be a good fit. In talking with the suggested business, the VR Counselor found out there were positions open that do not require a welding certificate, but did require the ability of the employee to complete a specific weld. The VR Counselor took this information back to Caleb's Industrial Arts Teacher who agreed to customize the curriculum for him to learn this skill. Caleb was able to learn the specific welding skills, interview for a position in the welding company prior to graduation and was offered a job. Upon graduation from high school he started working full-time at the company making a beginning wage of 15 dollars per hour. Thus, the school was able to report a positive outcome on its required reports to the state department of education while VR reported a successful rehabilitation case closure.

All partners continue to collaborate, meeting monthly during the school year to identify work experience opportunities for youth in the LEA's special education programs. As a result individual students with disabilities are gaining critical skills through valuable job experiences. Partners stay involved because they are meeting their goals and maximizing their resources.

**Case Example 2:
School-Community-Business Partnerships Working to Improve Systemic Support
for Youth Employment**

In one Maryland County, each year dozens of students and with disabilities youth in a local community sought summer employment through a summer employment program operated through the county's Local Workforce Investment Board (LWIB). Due to a concern that the program could not handle the growing demand of students and youth with disabilities who wished to participate, and due to a desire among the employers in the community that the program be more responsive to business perspectives, the local Business Leadership Network (BLN) convened a School-Community-Business partnership. The BLN operated under the aegis of the county's Chamber of Commerce so it had connections with a large number of potential employers.

The BLN shared the leadership of the partnership with the local school system's special education transition coordinator and the manager of the LWIB summer youth employment program. Other invited members of the partnership included a state VR agency representative who could authorize case service funds for job development and job coaching, and three community employment service providers who could directly provide job development and coaching.

The group initially met monthly to discuss needs of specific students and how they could maximize the resources of each representative to best serve the students who were referred to the summer youth employment program. The first year was dedicated to working out the logistics of how referrals are made, how cases are open in the respective participating service systems (i.e., VR and the WIB), and how student matches are made with participating employers. In the five years since the initiation of this partnership, referrals of students and youth with disabilities to the program have increased, successful matches to summer jobs have reached nearly 100%, and the satisfaction of participating employers with the hiring and support process has significantly increased.

All partners continue to collaborate to improve outcomes for students and youth with disabilities in this county. They each report this collaboration helps them maximize their respective resources. The Chamber of Commerce can point to a growing participation of its members in this program as a way of preparing the future workforce. At the same time the schools can offer more work experiences as important components of its educational services, the LWIB reports improved performance measures, and VR has boosted its successful case closures. At the systems level, the partnership is making collaboration work for everyone while the community's students and youth are gaining critical skills through valuable job experiences.

IV. Strategies for Engaging Key Partners

Generally speaking, participation in School-Community-Business partnerships does not directly cost money for any of the partners. But participation does require time, which to most partners is the same as money. Thus, an important element to engaging partners in any successful School-Community-Business partnership is making sure that participation is worth every partner's time.

The underlying approach for engaging each School-Community-Business partner is similar. Once their respective functions are understood partnership conveners should ask these questions:

- What do they bring to the partnership? That is, why does the partnership need them?
- How might they benefit? That is, what's in it for them?
- How do you make it worth their while?

Significant to engaging potential partners, it is usually necessary to identify the leadership or key professionals from each respective partner so that the buy-in and support for the effort by top administrators is provided.

What follows is a summary of key considerations and strategies to promote engagement for specific partners. Most strategies are relevant at both the individual and systems levels, but where distinctions are useful, they are provided.

Secondary Schools and School Systems, and Postsecondary Education Programs

Schools have a built in reason to engage in collaboration due to the mandates of special education law to plan for and promote transition activities that will lead to measurable results. Academic instruction and targeted curricula are also important to effective transition to adult employment and careers. These considerations are at the heart of schools' interest in collaboration with other partners. Table 3 summarizes strategies to engage educational partners. Note that some strategies are applicable across multiple areas of benefit.

Education Partner Benefit	Engagement Strategy
Improved transition planning (Indicator 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include processes and activities that insure that individual students are linked to work experiences for purposes of career assessment, work skill development, expanding preferences and choices about careers, and identifying accommodation and support needs that might be important in future employment. • Plan for other partners, such as youth employment service providers, to provide services that supplement school resources and support student education services, such as job development and coaching to students. • Plan for direct and straightforward processes to refer students to post-school services such as VR and other state agency services for which students may be eligible.
Improved post- school outcome reports (Indicator 14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for other partners to provide services that supplement school resources and support students education services, such as job development and coaching to students. • Plan for direct and straightforward processes to refer students to post school services such as VR and other state agency services for which students may be eligible.
Improved graduation rates (Indicator 1) Reduced Drop-out Rates (Indicator 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect work experiences and jobs to specific educational interventions and courses of study. • Provide processes for other partners, especially employers, to provide input to curriculum so it is relevant to future career and employment options.
Enhancements to curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect work experiences and jobs to specific educational interventions and courses of study. • Provide processes for other partners, especially employers, to provide input to curriculum so it is relevant to future career and employment options.

Business and Employers

Business and employer partners are arguably the most essential ingredient in effective School-Community-Business partnerships. Indeed, if the overarching partnership purpose is to increase and improve work experiences for students and youth with disabilities, then it is logical that prominent partnership participants be those who can make these opportunities available, that is, employers. In other words, work experiences and jobs cannot happen without them.

For making the connections between youth programs and employers it is important to understand that there are three reasons employers will become involved in School-Community-Business partnerships, in this order: (1) to meet a specific company need, such as filling a job opening or address a production or service need (2) to meet an industry-wide need, such as preparing potential new workers in a specific industry such as technology, retail, medical services, manufacturing, etc.; and (3) to meet a community need, such as helping student and youth with disabilities become more productive citizens, which in turn improves the business presence and engagement in the community (Luecking, 2004). Table 4 below uses these three reasons to frame potential engagement strategies.

Employer Partner Benefit	Engagement Strategy
Meeting a specific company need	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop profile of employers by size, type, and location. This enables quick reference regarding the community's employers and their major characteristics.• Streamline processes for referrals to employers from transition and youth service programs. Consider a single point of contact for specific employers or at least a clear process for making contact with employers.
Meeting an industry-wide need	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In concert with program providers and employers, develop work-based learning tools (e.g., assessment of skills development, checklists for use by workplace supervisors, etc.) based on industry standards and needs. Student and youth can thus be specifically prepared to develop skills relevant to that industry.• Identify employment trends, including projecting skill needs in particular industries

Employer Partner Benefit	Engagement Strategy
Meet a community need and improving business climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include local business organizations such as Chambers of Commerce as potential partners. Partners should also consider active involvement in business organizations as a way of reciprocating participation. Mutual support is always a good strategy! • Promote the participation of educators, employment professionals, and state agency personnel in activities that educate them about business and industry (e.g., externships, job shadows, etc.). This will not only help them “speak the language,” but will provide a perspective from which to see through the lens of the employer partners so as to better communicate and address business goals.

Employer engagement strategies will often differ depending on the size of the employer. For example, large employers may have community outreach offices and/or diversity initiatives that schools and community organizations can approach about participation in a partnership. Many small businesses do not have the ability to assign someone to directly represent the business, or their industry, in partnership activities. However, they are often part of community oriented small business associations that schools and other partners can reach out to such as a local Chamber of Commerce. Service clubs, such as Rotary or Lions Clubs are another avenue for outreach to employers as their members are often connected to the business community.

One key to successful employer involvement is to understand that the success of linking youth with work, and linking youth programs with employer partners, is as much about meeting employers’ needs as it is about youth or meeting the collective goals set by partners. That is, unless employers gain from the collaboration they are not likely to become or stay involved. Viewing employers as customers youth transition and employment services, and treating them as such, will make the entire endeavor more attractive and comfortable to employers.

Thus, much of the process of engaging employers in School-Community-Business partnerships is about showing how participation adds value to the company, to the industry, and to the overall business presence in the community. In other words, a key question to be addressed in attempts to garner employer collaboration is: will employers be better off for having been involved? Effective efforts to engage employers will seek to continually answer this question.

Government Agencies and Other Community Programs that Serve Youth with Disabilities

There are multiple state government agencies that may play a role on School-Community-Business partnerships. The most common are Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) agencies, Mental Health agencies, and state Jobs Centers (also known as One-Stop Career Centers). But there are many other potential partners including community rehabilitation and employment service providers, public income benefits support programs such as Supplemental Security Income, food stamps, and TANF, and other ancillary health and social service programs.

The most common of government program and community collaborators in School-Community-Business partnerships, and their functions, are summarized in Table 5 below. These entities can be involved at both the individual level, where their respective services are targeted to be applied to individual students and youth and their families, or the systems level where they may be involved in collaborations to improve systemic approaches to education and youth services overall.

Table 5 Community Agency and Program Partners	
Community Partner*	Function*
State vocational rehabilitation agencies	Federally funded program to provide rehabilitation services to eligible individuals with disabilities, including assessment, planning, training, job placement, supported employment, and other services leading to employment
State mental health and intellectual/developmental disabilities agencies	Provide and/or fund case management services, clinical services, vocational services, and supported employment for individuals who meet disability related eligibility requirements
Job Centers (also known as One-Stop Career Centers)	Centralized locations for career and job information, career assessment, career counseling, job training, and job placement services
Community rehabilitation providers and employment service agencies	Private or nonprofit agencies contracted by state agencies and/or local school districts to provide job placement, supported employment, and related services
Ancillary health and social service programs	An array of community services to address the various social and medical needs of its citizens
Public income benefits support	Cash support and medical insurance for financially needy or otherwise eligible individuals

*Table adapted with permission from: *The Way to Work: How to facilitate work experiences for youth in transition*, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company (2009).

The strategies for engaging each of these potential partners in School-Community-Business partnerships are the same as any other partner. That is, once their respective functions are understood partnership conveners should ask: What do they bring to the partnership? That is, why does the partnership need them? How might they benefit? That is, what's in it for them? And how do you make it worth their while to participate?

Engagement of these partners often requires identifying the leadership or key professional from the respective partner, and then negotiating their participation. This may sound simpler than it often is. The endorsement of top administrators is important for all partners, particularly community partners. Without administrative sanction of the partnership, the participation of an organization representative may be limited, regardless of their enthusiasm and competence. This can compromise the effectiveness and longevity of the partnership. It may take more time and energy but working to get highest administrative level buy-in from all partners is important to the partnership's success and sustainability.

Advocacy Organizations and School-Community-Business Partnerships

Much of the evolution of special education services, youth transition programs, and disability employment initiatives have been influenced by individuals and organizations that represent and advocate on behalf of disability groups. These advocacy groups often endeavor to represent and advocate for the interests of the larger category of disability, such as the American Association of People with Disabilities. Or they may represent specific disability groups such as The Arc which represents people with intellectual disabilities, the National Association on Mental Illness, the Learning Disabilities Association of America, the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, United Cerebral Palsy, and many others. Or they may be groups comprised of and lead by individuals with disabilities such as Partners for Policy Making, People First, Youth Leadership Networks and other self-advocacy groups.

At the local level, many of these organizations have chapters or affiliate groups. As such, they are often in a position to assist in the formation and in the activities of School-Community-Business partnerships. Representatives of these groups are thus potential partnership members. They are in a position to inform about the circumstances and issues related to specific disabilities and specific disability groups. Their participation also can insure the voices of youth with disabilities are represented, understood and heeded as the partnerships pursue their activities that are important to youth career development.

Family Engagement in School-Community-Business Partnerships

The perspective of families is important to consider as School-Community-Business partnerships develop. It is sometimes challenging to identify ways to best to include individual family members or organizations that represent families due to schedule conflicts and general demands on their time. However, if direct and regular participation

in partnership activities is not possible, then there may be alternative avenues to insure their input, such as participation on subcommittees. Another avenue is to recruit an organization which employs family members as advocates, such as Parent Information Centers, to provide representation in the partnership. Two resources that may be of use are the Center for Parent Information and Resources (www.parentcenterhub.org) and the Resources for Access, Independence, Self-determination and Employment (RAISE) technical assistance center (www.raisecenter.org).

At the individual level, families can play a key role in supporting the pursuit of, and participation in, work experiences and employment by their youth with disabilities. They are a valuable source of information about youth preferences and interests which might provide initial career direction. They are also in a position to work as a partner with professionals in identifying, monitoring, and evaluating youth work experience opportunities. In fact, family involvement will be a constant whether or not a School-Community-Business partnership is in place. When School-Community-Business partnerships are directly addressing the career development activities of individual youth, however, family involvement should be encouraged and sought so that they can provide information and support for decisions that are made regarding their youth family member.

At the larger systems level, it is not necessarily common for family members to be invited to participate as a formally designated partnership member. This is because partnership membership is often determined by those entities that have a mandated responsibility to serve students and youth with disabilities in various ways as described in previous sections. But in instances when families are invited as members, they often are in positions to provide useful and critical systems-level perspectives.

Table 6 summarizes the role of families as they pertain to the overall purpose of School-Community-Business partnerships. These roles are critical pieces to the puzzle in that family relationships with their young family members with disabilities are more direct and likely to outlast the work of any formally structured partnership put together to assist youth. They also are in a position to provide consistent input to any partnership member as they work to support youth career development.

Table 6 Family Role in Systems and Individual Student	
Potential Family Roles at the Systems Level	Potential Family Roles at the Individual Student Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing input to youth serving agencies, employers, and other community entities beyond high school • Elevating and refining expectations that all youth with disabilities benefit from work experiences and paid employment • Serving as "ambassadors" for younger families beginning transition process • Cultivating their personal community networks for businesses to support youth work experiences • Developing relationships with business and community partners to help appreciate /youth and family perspectives • Informing family networks, such as PTA or Parent Information Centers, about partnership activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source of support to youth beyond secondary and postsecondary education • Attending and contributing to IEP meetings where transition planning is discussed • Sharing their perspectives about youth's talents, strengths, and support needs with professionals and employers • Assisting youth to be their own advocates in the pursuit of career goals • Providing networks and contacts for potential work experiences and job opportunities • Reinforcing work expectations to the youth • Offering input for addressing challenges during transition and employment planning (e.g., transportation, unique accommodation needs, and health concerns) • Exposing youth to their own personal employment experiences

For many families, the process of transition to employment and careers is the culmination of a long-standing relationship with schools. However, upon school exit the youth's transition is not over. Thus, there is value in families' engagement with other School-Community-Business partners. Their roles may change as youth embark on transition-related activities, but their knowledge, support, and experiences with their youth can be instrumental to successful outcomes not only for their youth, but for other youth and for the larger purpose of School-Community-Business partnerships.

V. Sustaining the Work of School-Community-Business Partnerships

Addressing Challenges that Can Effect Partnerships: Blending and Braiding Resources

One factor that can have a stifling effect on School-Community-Business partnerships is the categorical nature of funding and government resources. This often acts, in the worst case, to create “silos” where respective entities operate in isolation from one another. In less problematic cases, there may be a willingness to work in concert, but there also may be perceived inflexibility as to how categorical resources are applied.

Strategies that allow funds and resources to be used in more flexible, coordinated, and sustainable ways are significant to the success of any venture where multiple funding sources are involved. When collectively pooled, resources from schools, vocational rehabilitation, Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA) programs, community agencies, employers and other partners can produce positive outcomes for students and youth with disabilities well beyond the scope of what any single partner can hope to accomplish on its own (National Governors Association, 2004). Blending and braiding funding streams has become a practical strategy for funding services for transition and employment initiative youth with disabilities (Mooney & Luecking, 2006). This involves understanding the goals of each of the funding entities and how partners can work collaboratively to meet or exceed those goals through re-application of their respective resources through blending and braiding.

Blending funding involves mechanisms that pool funds from multiple resources so that, for the most part, there is a common application of funds and their origins are indistinguishable to the beneficiary of the service funded through these resources. This is more difficult to do because of regulations governing the use of funds, but where it is creatively applied it can go a long way toward minimizing – or even eliminating – problematic service “silo-ing.” An example of this is when VR funds are added to generic WIOA summer youth employment funds so that students and youth with disabilities can participate in these programs.

Braiding funding taps into existing categorical funding streams and uses them to support unified initiatives that may be applied in as integrated manner as possible. For example, at the individual level, braided funding may involve utilizing funds from multiple government sources such as VR, WIOA, and I/DD, to meet the costs of employment development plans for an individual youth. An agreement among these agencies to apply this approach when serving all youth eligible for their respective services would be an example of collaborating to braid resources at the systems level. The collaborative transition model presented on page 13 is an example of braiding resources for the benefit of individual youth with disabilities and for the larger community approach to serving all youth in transition.

In any case, the potential pitfalls of silo-ization and their consequent problems for School-Community-Business collaboration can be addressed by partner efforts to blend and braid available resources. This can be an important strategy to maximize partnership effectiveness.

Connecting Partnership Activities to Outcomes

This Guide has provided reasons and strategies for forming and sustaining School-Community-Business partnerships. Where partnerships should start, and end, is the same place: providing opportunities for youth with disabilities to obtain work experiences and jobs, and to develop a clear career path. That should be the ultimate goal of the partnership. In fact, partnerships are best served when each member can answer affirmatively these questions:

- Did I join the partnership understanding the end goal?
- Am I remaining involved because the partnership is making progress toward the end goal?
- Am I contributing to activities that help the partnership reach the end goal?
- Is participating in the partnership helping my organization reach its goals?

In other words, is the partnership worthwhile to the community's youth with disabilities, and is it worthwhile to each participating member? Although quantifiable youth employment goals are paramount, there are other worthy outcomes of partnerships. They are the improved circumstances and processes that lead to overall improvement youth employment outcomes. The example presented on page 14 illustrates ways that School-Community-Business partnerships add value to many different stakeholders.

Improved models of linking work-based learning to academic instruction

Work experiences in isolation from specific school-based activity or from educational curriculum are of course useful for youth career development. However, when they are provided in relationship with particular courses of instruction, they can be powerful. Work experiences such as work sampling, internships, and school work co-ops that are specific to learning modules or courses of study have been proven to be effective for overall grasp and application of subject matter (Ravitz, 2008). Under these circumstances, students with disabilities are more likely to stay engaged in school, and more likely to exit school prepared for adult employment.

In no small way, this agenda is supported when there are well formed School-Community-Business partnerships. Not the least of the benefits of these partnerships is the enhanced ability to link students and youth to the important learning adjuncts that work experiences provide. Thus, at the conceptual level, one

critical outcome is better learning processes for students and youth, which promotes youth career development.

Employer-Led Youth Transition and Employment Initiatives

In many communities, employers have started their own initiatives to bring youth into their workplaces. They have seen that this is one way to expand workforce recruitment and the development of the future workforce. They also recognize that youth with disabilities are an important subgroup of youth which represent viable future employees. In fact, what could be more promising to the end goal of youth employment and career development than employers leading the way?

One well known example of an employer-led initiative is Project SEARCH (Daston, Reihle & Rutkowski, 2013). Begun by Cincinnati Children's Hospital in the mid-90's to provide work experiences to youth with intellectual disabilities, Project SEARCH has expanded to a host of communities throughout the country. Through this model, hospitals, banks, and other large employers provide opportunities for youth to rotate through different parts of the company's operation to explore options and learn various occupational skills and workplace behaviors. Project SEARCH is only possible, however, when there is a strong partnership between the host companies, schools, government funding entities, and community employment service providers. Literally thousands of youth with disabilities have participated in these work-based learning opportunities, resulting in thousands of careers launched – tangible outcomes indeed!

In Project SEARCH communities, value is also added for all partners in the same manner as described in earlier sections of this Guide. Schools are able to better develop viable transition plans, VR agencies open cases that lead to higher successful case closures, and community employment service providers enroll new service recipients who have already had solid work experiences. The result is a sustainable mechanism to foster youth employment preparation.

Collaborative Transition Models

One clear positive outcome for students and youth with disabilities is when they not only exit school with a clear career path, but with an actual job in place. In other words, they seamlessly transition from being a student to being an employed adult. This is especially important for those students with disabilities who require connections to post-school services to maintain the benefits of their public education. There are several models of the types of collaboration necessary for this outcome. Not surprisingly, they reflect exactly the type of partnerships and partnership activities described in this Guide.

There are a growing number of examples where schools, government agencies such as VR and I/DD services, One-Stop Career Centers, postsecondary educational institutions, and employer representatives, with involvement and input from

student/youth and families, collaborate to facilitate a seamless transition for youth with disabilities from education to employment (Simonsen, Stuart, Luecking, & Certo, 2013). For example, in Maryland several school districts adopted an organizing framework for seamless transition that featured strong collaborative partnerships. The collaborations associated with this model led to very encouraging outcomes for participating students and youth with disabilities (Luecking & Luecking, 2013) and for the collaborating partners (Fabian, Simonsen, Luecking, Stuart, & Deschamps, in review). The collaborations have also been formally sustained for youth transition to employment. A key outcome of the collaboration, then, is an ongoing collaborative structure that has proven influence on youth transition success.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Potential collaborators in student/youth transition and employment activities might ask themselves:

- Do we “meet to meet”?
- Do we meet to satisfy some grant or funding mandate?
- Do we meet merely to organize a “hand off” to the next service?
- Do we meet because an influential community leader encouraged it?

OR

- Do we meet with the end in mind – youth career development and employment?

AND

- Do we meet so that each collaborating partner gains something from the relationships?

Readers by now know what the answers should be to each of these questions. This Guide presented reasons why youth career development is served by effective School-Community-Business partnerships, strategies useful in forming and managing these partnerships, and how these strategies produce desired outcomes for the youth and for the collaborating partners. To complement this Guide, on the next page we have included a list of additional useful resources for furthering knowledge of issues and activities that contribute to both youth career development and partnership management. The intention is that with this Guide and the referenced resources, the reader will be well prepared to encourage, lead, and/or participate in the collaborative activities that are so necessary for youth with disabilities to successfully transition to an adult life that features a meaningful and successful career.

Additional Resources

Setting the stage for School-Community-Business partnerships

Handbook for Implementing a Comprehensive Work-Based Learning Program According to the Fair Labor Standards Act

Useful information about when and under what conditions youth must be paid during work experiences is this publication:

<http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/flsa/default.asp>

411 on Disability Disclosure

This is an excellent resource on disclosure decisions for youth and those assisting them: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>)

Forming School-Community-Business partnerships

Making the Connections: Growing and Supporting New Organizations: Intermediaries

A useful resource for perspectives on partner engagement, including employers, through intermediaries is available from the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/information-brief-08>.

Strategies for Engaging Key Partners

Strategies for Youth Workforce Programs to Become Employer-Friendly Intermediaries

This publication provides useful approaches to engage employers in youth transition and employment initiatives: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/information-brief-12>.

Sustaining School-Community-Business Partnerships

Blending and braiding funds and resources: The intermediary as facilitator

This resource provides considerable detail on and examples of blending and braiding resources: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/information-brief-18>.

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