ENLIST EMPLOYER PARTNERS TO EXPAND YOUR OUTREACH

Employer engagement is a core element of the Youth CareerConnect (YCC) program, and collaborating with multiple employers is integral to the program’s success and sustainability. One highly effective way to develop new partnerships is to encourage existing employer partners to act as champions. This toolkit is designed to help you enlist dedicated employers to communicate the benefits of your program to other companies and business organizations. It also provides tips for turning your students’ work-based learning success stories into powerful tools that you can use in your own outreach to potential employer partners.

Build on Current Employer Partnerships
Supportive employers can be highly productive allies in your efforts to establish new business partners. In doing so, they will have the satisfaction of helping you spread the word about an initiative that has benefited them as well as your students. Having worked so diligently to secure strong employer partnerships, you can now build on that success.

Help Your Employer Partners Help You: A Checklist
While employers may be more than willing to assist you in your outreach to other businesses, the process will still demand some effort on their part. Be sure to make a plan that accomplishes your goals while being mindful of their time and workload.

Do your homework.
It is important to continually capture evidence of how well your employer partnership is working so you can promote that success to other businesses. As you would for all your outreach, gather as much positive information as possible. As companies struggle to find qualified employees, seeing that your program helps create a training and staffing pipeline will make partnering an easy decision.

Have the following information available for your employer’s reference and as hand-outs:

- List of career pathway programs available and how the courses support work-based learning. Include data on how many students participate in each pathway and in what capacity they are working with the employer.
- Provide data of the impact on the business and/or the local economy, and of participants’ progress (how many have achieved paid positions, apprenticeships, credentials).

Developed by High Impact Partners, in collaboration with subject matter experts and U.S. Department of Labor staff, under the Youth CareerConnect Technical Assistance Contract.
The benefits to employers:
- Access to skilled job candidates with specific skills, certificates, and credentials.
- Training created to specifically meet employer needs and that can be evaluated by students’ job performance.
- The ability to influence curriculum to better align with their specific skill needs.
- Credential and certification programs that meet industry standards.
- The infusion of energy from students that can often revitalize staff and inspire positive change in established approaches or organizational culture.
- The opportunity to exhibit their investment in their community to a larger audience.

Say “Thank you!”
Be sure to thank your employers periodically for their work with your program and to start any request for outreach help with an expression of gratitude for their involvement. A thank you can be as simple as a letter, or it can be an award, a proclamation, or a more formal recognition ceremony. Some additional suggestions:

- Recognize and thank each employer member. Note their individual contributions and impact. Send a copy of recognition statements to the individual’s immediate supervisor or CEO.
- Invite employers to regular celebrations where the team can note their overall successes and acknowledge special contributions.
- Use the team’s outreach communication system (bulletins, news releases, and blogs) to regularly highlight the contributions of individuals and their companies.

ASK for help.
While it may seem obvious, we often forget that if we want to receive help, we have to ask for it! If an employer has had success with your program, they are already aware of its impact and have confidence in its effectiveness. Harness their enthusiasm by asking them to share it and invite them along as a program champion.

Sample approach: “You have been such a great supporter of our program and our students. Would you be willing to help us spread the word about our program to other companies in the area?”

Be specific about HOW the employer can help you.
Make a specific request as to what you would like your employer to do. Maybe you would like a reference to a certain company or a business in a particular sector. Perhaps you just want them to talk up your program to their peers. You can also provide them with some options so they can choose the one they feel most comfortable doing.

Indirect Advocacy – Ask for references or testimonials that you can use for your own outreach purposes:
- A reference to someone at another business (or in another department) that you can contact.
- A written testimonial that you can disseminate.
A short video in which they share their YCC experience for you to post on your website, circulate through social media, and use in employer engagement presentations.

**Direct Advocacy** – Ask them to actively advocate for your program by:

- Talking about their experience in conversations with work colleagues or business peers.
- Casually promoting your program at meetings or networking events.
- Sending notes of endorsement to other area businesses.
- Making a formal presentation at an event, meeting, or other business gathering they might normally attend, such as Chamber of Commerce or Rotary Club.

See APPENDIX A for samples and suggestions.

**Make it easy for them.**

While your employer partner may be more than willing to help promote your program, you should try to make it as easy as possible for them to satisfy your request. Once you have their commitment, follow-up with them to provide any needed support or resources. Supply them with guidance, talking points, and materials as appropriate. The more prepared they are, the better they will be at representing your program to future partners. *(See APPENDIX A for samples and suggestions.)*

- Have a conversation with your employer to help them articulate how your students are positively impacting their organization.
- Supply talking points to use as a guide when they speak to groups or individual businesspeople. You may want to tailor the material to suit specific audiences.
- Create attractive visual aids that they can use, when appropriate, to reinforce their message.
- Supply them with handouts containing program information and contact information.

See APPENDIX A for samples and suggestions.

**Follow up!**

Hopefully, the outreach efforts by your business partners will help develop new leads among other employers. Remember that this is not the end of the process. It will be up to you to turn these leads into active relationships. Be sure to collect contact information for any prospects whenever possible. Follow up with them individually and include them in all future outreach communications.
APPENDIX A: Suggestions & Samples

Creative Ways to Involve Employer Partners as Advocates

**Written Testimonials**
A brief quote from an employer partner can be a powerful endorsement for your program and is a perfect addition to outreach materials from printed pieces to social media. This quote from the Senior Vice President of Corning is a good model. [https://gradsoflife.org/success-stories/corning-incorporated/](https://gradsoflife.org/success-stories/corning-incorporated/)

**Video Testimonials**
A video testimonial can be used on social media, on your website, in a presentation, or as a segment of a promotional video for your program. It could include one or more employees commenting on your students or your program, sharing some aspect of their experience with students from your program, or making a general recommendation for your program.

**Video Interviews**
Conversations can be more interesting than a single talking head, and the interview format often makes fascinating storytelling. Consider having one of your students interview their employer, supervisor or a co-worker. NPR’s “Story Corps” was created for radio, but it offers a great template for conversational interviews that are both moving and compelling. [https://storycorps.org/listen/](https://storycorps.org/listen/)

**Video Tours of Employer Workplace**
A casual video tour of your students’ workplace can be a fun and light-hearted way of demonstrating how important your employers are to the lives of your students. The video quality on most smart phones is high, and today’s students are comfortable creating videos and documenting their lives. The video can encompass an employer testimonial or simply include visuals of the employer and other staff members. An on-camera “thumbs up” from an enthusiastic business partner might be all the endorsement you need!

**Employer Engagement Outreach Video**
If you have the capacity to produce a more elaborate video about your work-based learning, this animated video for the RK Mechanical, Inc. apprenticeship program may serve as inspiration. [http://rkmi.com/careers-3/apprenticeship-programs/](http://rkmi.com/careers-3/apprenticeship-programs/)

These live-action videos about job-training and work-based learning should give you additional ideas for how to capture the essence of your workplace program on video.  
Direct Mail Outreach
Create a postcard, letter or simple brochure (with a photo or two) highlighting the success of your collaboration with the employer. Ask the employer to write a brief personal note to some of their close business contacts. Collect, stamp, and mail the cards.

Presentations
If your employer partner is willing to make a formal presentation to a group, follow these guidelines to help ensure a fruitful outcome:

- Supply talking points. (See Conversation Starters below.)
- Provide handouts that describe your program and include contact information.
- Provide a sign-up sheet to collect contact information from employers who may want to learn more about the program.
- If appropriate, and if a projection system will be available, any of these options will enhance the employer’s presentation:
  - Create a short presentation with slides that show how the program has benefited the employer, such as training potential job applicants, changing the dynamic of the company workforce, or providing staff to complete a lingering task. Use data, if available.
  - Any of the video ideas above would work well accompanying an oral presentation.
  - If you already have an outreach video, add some footage of the employer and the your students in the workplace.

The questions in the section below (Conversation Starters) offer suggestions for testimonial topics, interview material, presentations, PowerPoints, and talking points.

Conversation Starters
These questions can be used in a few ways and can serve a variety of purposes. They can be compiled into a questionnaire that the employer can use on their own, or you can use them as a guide in discussing how the employer can best express their support for your program. They can also serve as talking points for casual dialogue; interview questions for a video conversation; or the basis of a testimonial, a group presentation, or an extended video that you create about your program. The questions may help elicit interesting tidbits of information or remind the employer of anecdotes they can share about the students.

- What types of work are the students performing?
- Are any of them performing beyond their capacity or requirements?
- Have they contributed any innovative ideas to your department or company?
- Have they impacted the business in any particular way? The workplace? The organizational culture? Their supervisors or co-workers?
- Have there been any unexpected benefits of working with YCC students? Or anything that surprised you about the participants?
- Are there any particular attributes of the YCC students that stand out?
- Were you initially reluctant to become a part of the YCC program?
  - If so, what was it that changed your outlook?
- Do you have any favorite stories about any of the YCC students?
- Are you reminded in any way of your younger self or your early work experience when working with the YCC students?
- Did the YCC students change the way you look at any particularly difficult workplace issues (diversity, gender equality)?
- Did working with the YCC students strengthen your community engagement and, if so, how?
- Are you seeing a more robust pipeline of employee candidates in your field as a result of YCC efforts?
- Have you seen any change in how area youth are viewing occupational career paths vs. college?
APPENDIX B: Resources

A Resource Guide to Engaging Employers
This resource guide, created by Jobs for the Future, presents working models of successful employer engagement and lessons for securing and sustaining partnerships with employers. It was written to help education and training providers fully realize the value of strategic, long-term, and intensive partnerships with employers.

The Business Engagement Collaborative Community
This online collaborative provides economically valuable solutions for businesses across the business lifecycle, enabling participants to share ideas, experiences, expertise, resources, and outcomes. It also promotes innovations in business engagement strategies, tactics, partnerships, measurements, and more. While the collaborative focuses primarily on Rapid Response, layoff aversion, and sector strategies, it is useful to anyone who is interested in elevating business engagement to a prominent place in their state, region, or community.

The Goals and Dimensions of Employer Engagement in Workforce Development Programs
This brief offers a simple framework that lays out why workforce programs engage employers and why employers engage with workforce programs. It specifies how employers are involved with workforce programs and describes the challenges for both sides. This framework can help workforce organizations sharpen their thinking about employer engagement and their goals for such partnerships.

Partnerships: Tapping the Power of Employers
This webinar explores the challenge of fostering employer partnerships and discusses workable strategies for working effectively with these valued and critical associates in the YCC environment.

Tools for Building Employer/Educator Partnerships
This website was created by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education to introduce employers and educators to the value of partnering; describe best practices and success stories, and disseminate evidence-based tools that contain academic and practical solutions for building partnerships, sustaining collaborations, and creating career pathways.

Using Storytelling to Share Your Program Success
This webinar introduces the fundamentals of developing the kind of memorable narratives that help win over new employer partners: understanding your audience and the message you want to deliver, enlivening stories with characters and details, touching the right emotional chord, and building a bank of stories for a variety of purposes.

Youth CareerConnect Employer Engagement Handbook
The handbook addresses employer engagement and partnership challenges, and proposes ideas, tools, and tips for building, extending, and sustaining employer relationships and advisory groups. Strategies provided in this guide may be used as presented or tailored to address the specific needs of a broad spectrum of workforce youth program grantees interested in improving their relationships with employers.