



# Grow Your CTE Program Through Employer Engagement

Meaningful partnerships with employers are crucial to ensure students are participating in career and technical education (CTE) programs that are aligned with business and industry needs and have genuine value for both your students and the employers with whom they engage. As an educator, you have what it takes to connect with business and industry stakeholders in your community. It might seem intimidating at first, but focus on one step at a time, and before you know it, you'll be taking your CTE program to the next level!

## Assessing potential partnerships:

- 1) Listen: What is the employer/business ready for?
- 2) Determine: How are they able to work with your students and programs?
- 3) Assess: What do they need from you?  
Are you able to meet their needs?
- 4) Establish: Are they ready to move forward with a partnership/relationship?

## Getting started: The Five C's\* *(do them in order):*

- 1) Contact (cold call, email, stop in)
- 2) Connect (build a professional relationship where ideas develop)
- 3) Communicate (exchange mutually beneficial information and learn each other's language)
- 4) Coordinate (organize activities)
- 5) Collaborate (work together to achieve opportunities for students and business)

\*Courtesy Russell J. Thelin, senior policy fellow at Institute for Community Inclusion

**A note about language:** school language is very different from business and industry language. Also, each profession/industry has its own language. To build a mutually beneficial relationship, consider the implications of the language you use.

**Sample school language:** student, teacher, participant, orientation, support, training, class

**Sample business language:** applicant, candidate, talent, worker, recruitment, vendor, contractor, workplace

# Sample activities to increase employer engagement:

## **Advisory committees**

Engaging with a diverse panel of local stakeholders, business and industry professionals, and employers can provide a built-in sounding board for matters such as standards and curriculum, labor market needs, and setting local priorities for CTE clusters and pathways. Business and industry relationships can also evolve into professional development opportunities for CTE teachers, counselors, and administrators.

## **CTSO engagement**

Career and technical student organizations are a great resource for your students and your CTE program. They also provide an avenue for connecting with employers. CTE programs can recruit local employers to serve as advisors or judges, help design competitions, or donate competition space and equipment. Business and industry relationships can also evolve into professional development opportunities for CTE teachers, counselors, and administrators.

## **CTE advocacy**

Local business and industry partners can actively advocate to local, state, and national policy makers to raise public awareness of CTE in general, your CTE program in particular, and in turn, the need for funding. As industry stakeholders, they're also a great resource in helping to dispel antiquated stereotypes often associated with CTE.

## **Career guidance**

In cooperation with CTE teachers and school counselors, your employer partners can play an important role in career guidance with their unique perspectives through efforts such as providing speakers to enhance career exploration efforts, hosting or attending career fairs for your students, or possibly becoming business/industry mentors to your students.

## **Work-based learning opportunities**

Work-based learning opportunities are one of the most direct and impactful forms of employer engagement. Job shadowing, internships, classroom visits from employers, business and industry tours, and even virtual learning experiences can provide invaluable learning opportunities for your students.

## **Monetary or in-kind contributions**

Business and industry partners are often very enthusiastic about contributing to CTE programs with both monetary and material donations. Contributions in the form of scholarships to CTE programs or individual students, as well as in-kind donations in the form of equipment, consumables, or other resources, can help CTE programs maintain robust, industry-relevant standards and curriculum.