CUNY CareerPATH:
Business Engagement Guide

CUNY CareerPATH

Table of Contents

CUNY CareerPATH: Business Engagement Guide

Cloe Andrade
CUNY Central Office of Academic Affairs
April 2015

Introduction

A common theme across higher education institutions is the need to prepare graduates with the skills and competencies required to succeed in a labor market that is constantly changing. As a public institution, the City University of New York (CUNY) is an important actor that addresses the educational and skill needs of New Yorkers as well as the workforce needs of the business community. We do this work by offering industry-relevant programs, keeping up to date on labor market demands, engaging and partnering with businesses, and preparing students for careers. Business engagement should be robust and lead to opportunities for both the college and the employer.

Business Engagement

Developing and cultivating strong business partnerships with industry representatives has proven to be an effective strategy. Before engaging businesses, it is important to develop a clear vision, set expectations and goals, and then create a strategy. To form relationships that will evolve into strong, long-term partnerships and produce positive outcomes for the businesses, CUNY, and our students, we must consistently work to engage them on an ongoing basis. Here are some reasons why investing our time and energy into business engagement is so important:

- Businesses are an important part of our local community and CUNY is fully invested in building relationships and strengthening our partnerships. CUNY is a NYC public institution, and our economic impact is greatest when we partner with industry.

- Local businesses are the main employers of the skilled workers that CUNY teaches and trains. More than 1 million CUNY graduates already contribute to New York's growth and vibrancy[1].

- These partnerships support our efforts to keep curriculum up-to-date, increase job placement rates, create work-based learning opportunities, connect students to internships, improve our program design/development, and keep up with the skill needs and emerging business trends. Our students also benefit from business partners who can serve as mentors, offer practical experiences, and provide introductions to the work environment.

- Grant makers increasingly insist on collaboration with employers. Building relationships for a single grant program often takes more time and is less effective than a relationship that has been sustained and nurtured over a longer period. In addition, long-term partnerships can better position your program for future funding.

- In key fields, our students are losing job placements to those who graduate from private institutions. We need to challenge this on behalf of our students, and the city/communities we live and serve.

- Businesses can also serve as advocates for our programs and students.

Purpose

This guide is meant to help program staff, specifically job developers and program leadership, to:

> 1. think more broadly about their business engagement activities; and
> 2. consider other ways that relationships with businesses can be developed and managed.

This guide will provide practical strategies and tools to help staff strategically identify businesses to partner with and to structure partnerships with businesses to ensure the most is made of these relationships.

[1] City University of New York. "Jobs for New York's Future." May 2012

I Getting Started – Know Your Program

As a workforce professional responsible for engaging businesses, it is important that you understand your program's mission, goals, and strengths. You can't be the best representative of your program and its students to prospective business partners if you don't thoroughly know the program and how it relates to the larger industry it resides in. The following steps will help you gain a deeper understanding of your program.

Step 1: **Gather and Review Labor Market Data.**
Conduct labor market research about the industries, sectors, and/or occupations being served by your program. Gather information from a diverse pool of labor market information sources such as government data, business intelligence, and institutional knowledge.

- Visit the CUNY Labor Market Information Service (LMIS) website at: http://www.gc.cuny.edu/lmis to access reports, publications, data, and other relevant information pertaining to your program's focus. LMIS is a valuable resource to find data projections about growing and shrinking industries and occupations in NYC.

- The New York State Department of Labor also has information available on its website at: http://labor.ny.gov/stats/.

- Additionally, industry associations and business experts should also be consulted to solicit other perspectives and information.

- Gather intelligence from key staff members across your college campus and within CUNY.

- Research employment trends for your program's industry or sector. Get information about the different types of businesses in the sector which are doing or will be doing the most hiring during the lifecycle of your program.

- Understand what skills are most in demand and determine if your program is uniquely preparing students for the industry. Take an inventory of special program features that would make your graduates more attractive to employers.

Step 2: **Research and Compile Information Regarding Your Program.**

Program Questions to Consider

- What is the mission of your program?

- What does it teach?
  What industries/occupations does it focus on?

- Does it offer special features?
  Industry recognized certifications?
  Specialized trainings?

- Who does it serve?
  Who are its participants?

- What are your program goals and performance targets?

- What are its most successful outcomes?

- What challenges does it face?

II   Creating a Business Engagement Plan

After completing your research, the next step is to create a business engagement plan. This plan will help you identify a strategic course of action and activities that need to take place to meet program goals, as well as help you prioritize and determine your program's business engagement needs, including those of your students. Consider what types of business make good partners. In addition, understanding your students' goals and needs will help you organize your business engagement plan. Follow these five steps to draft your plan:

Step 1: **Prioritize Needs**
Based on your program research, prioritize the immediate, mid-term, and long-term needs that businesses can help you meet. Determine the needs of your prospective partners and determine which needs you can help them meet. Set goals and create a timeline with due dates to meet your goals.

Complete A Business Inventory
Step 2: Develop an organizing framework for your current inventory of partners that will help you categorize your partnerships, for example those that provide employment opportunities, those that serve as business intelligence/resources, and those that take on an advisor role.

Step 3: **Prioritize Particular Partnerships**

Pinpoint the partnerships that you can build upon and deepen. Find out if other colleges or programs are working with any of your business partners, and determine if there are opportunities to collaborate with other colleges to strengthen your partnerships.

Step 4: **Prioritize Relationships by Sector**

Develop your expertise in one particular sector and focus on building business relationships in this area. Give yourself a reasonable timeframe to do this before you choose to expand your knowledge base to other sectors.

Step 5: **Seek Training For Yourself and Your Coworkers**

Identify key staff to work with you and ensure they have the proper training and information to do their piece of the industry engagement work. The Workforce Professionals Training Institute (WPTI) is an organization that provides professional development opportunities for workforce professionals, which can help your program build its internal capacity. Develop an accountability system and checkpoints so responsibilities are clear and progress is regularly measured.

Step 6: **Perform a SWOT Analysis**

Once you have completed steps 1-5, you should conduct a Business Engagement SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and serves as an assessment tool. A SWOT analysis can help you to take stock of your business engagement capacity and later help you devise a strategy.

	HELPFUL	HARMFUL
INTERNAL	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
EXTERNAL	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

(Note: You can use a SWOT analysis for other business type scenarios.)

SWOT Analysis Questions to Consider:

- What is strongest about your business engagement? Why? How can you leverage this strength for your current program?

- Where are you weakest? Why? What things do you need to do to build up your capacity in this area?

- What opportunities are you seeing (for example, higher skill demands by local employers or a demand for your students' skill sets in a new sector)? What things do you need to do to take advantage of these opportunities?

- What threats are you seeing (for example, economic contraction or changes in business trends)? How can business engagement help you minimize the impact of these threats on your program goals and outcomes?

Step 7: **Envision a Business Partnership Funnel**

Your business relationships are like a funnel. At the top are a wide net of businesses that are aware of your college, program, and benefits to them. You likely have fewer deep relationships, and therefore, the funnel narrows. At the bottom are the committed partnerships.

- Raising Awareness – In order for businesses to connect to your program, they have to know it exists. Develop an effective marketing plan (see chapter 3) to maximize the number of companies you reach. Your goal should be to connect with as many businesses as possible.

- Targeted Engagement – Identify specific businesses and industry groups that you want to connect with because you see a mutual benefit for you both. Engage these groups in a focused way and create a strategy to keep them interested in working with you.

- Negotiation & Partnership Development – While you should always be seeking new business relationships, you should also aim to continuously develop your relationship with existing partners. This relationship negotiation process involves regularly engaging to learn about your partners' changing needs, their "pain points", and identifying services and resources that you can provide that can help them where they are at that moment. By looking for new ways to add depth to your business relationships, you will be laying the foundations for sustainable, long-term partnerships.

- Commitment – Committed partners are those that agree to partner with your program on an ongoing basis, in a substantive way such as curriculum development, serving on an advisory board, providing resources such as space or expertise, and/or consistently hiring graduates. Additionally, it also involves

seeking out new opportunities for their involvement in the program. Not all businesses that you deal with will reach this level; however the more companies you strategically and thoughtfully engage, the more you increase the likelihood of commitment.

COMMITMENT = JOB PLACEMENTS, ADVISING, PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

Adapted from "Employer Engagement: Building Dynamic Relationships with Employers in Teen and Young Adult Employment Programs." By Common Wealth Corporation. 2013.
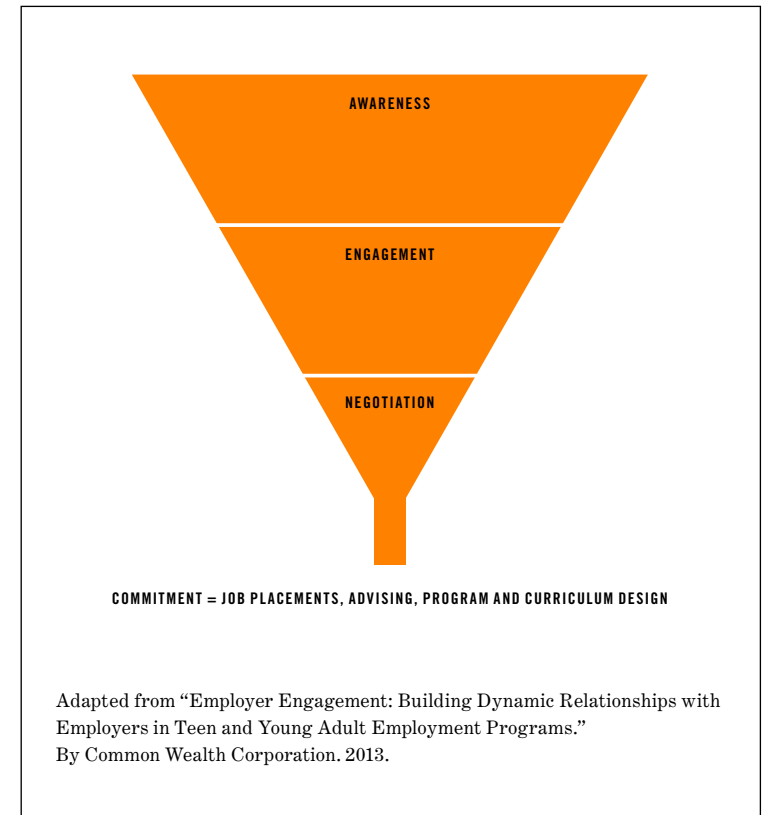
Preparation Checklist

	Research your program mission, target population, target industry, and goals.
	Research labor market data using a diverse set of sources.
	Prioritize your immediate and long-term program needs and what you can do to meet your business partners' needs.
	Organize your business inventory list.
	Prioritize your strong partners and find out if other departments and colleges are working with them as well.
	Conduct a SWOT analysis of your current business engagement approach.
	Develop your business partnership funnel.

III Engaging with Business

Effective business engagement requires proactivity, strategic thinking, and full ownership of engagement activities. Marketing and outreach should be happening constantly and relationships should be deepening over time. Messaging to businesses should remain consistent no matter how it is delivered and who in your program delivers it. Interacting with business is more than just reaching out to employers for jobs, or convening an industry advisory board for a quarterly meeting, or asking them to come as a guest speaker once a year. While organizing these activities is important, if they aren't done frequently enough, then they are considered one-time transactions and may not maximize the relationship to its full potential.

Developing Your Business Pitch

Businesses may not have the time and resources needed to solve all of their ongoing workforce problems. This dilemma is an opportunity for you and your program to solve a problem they face, while also helping you to achieve your program goals. To start developing your pitch you should:

- Identify the challenges and needs of the businesses you are targeting. Understand that this is not a one-time activity but one that will continue as a relationship is built.

- Assess the challenges/needs and determine how you can help and offer solutions.

- Quantify the resources — such as time, money, and staff turnover — that your offerings will save the business, and provide an estimate of your service cost value.

- Develop a compelling pitch that is clear and free of education and workforce development jargon. It should be solutions-oriented and focus on the value-added benefits that the business will receive from collaborating with your program. Remember to keep it short, clear, and customized to each employer.

Preparing to Pitch Your Program

As you develop your pitch, it is important to understand the value of your program, services, and graduates. This will allow you to speak directly to the concerns of potential business partners, while also demonstrating a broader awareness of their industry or sector.

Your pitch should include:

Hook: ask a question or share some thought provoking information that primes the employer to hear what you have to say.

Understanding: highlight your services using your core message of benefits to employers and supporting evidence.

Decision: address key concerns and make "the ask" (for a longer meeting, permission to send some resumes, a time to schedule candidates, etc.).

Begin your process by crafting some bullet points that you would include in a 30 second "elevator pitch" to help you prepare for business encounters/meetings. Research prospective businesses ahead of time to ensure that you hit major points about their company and potential needs. For example, each company will vary in size, location, job opportunities.

You need to have baseline knowledge about them before you offer your services.

Establish a need to be a resource and entice businesses to want to work with you. Use words like "at no cost" instead of "free." Refer to your students as professionals within their industry.

Executing A Business Pitch

Your business pitch should be aimed at provoking the prospective partner to want to learn more about your program. An attractive business pitch should be short and sweet, and produce engaging dialogue. Your ultimate goal at this stage is to keep the business engaged and interested in meeting with you. You need to establish how your program can meet the needs of your business partners. Your conversations with businesses should lead you to determine if they are able to offer jobs, internships, advisement, mentorship, etc.

In preparation for customizing your pitch, follow the steps below:

1. Be clear on the goal of your interaction with potential partners. What do you want to gain from the partner-ship? Be careful not to guarantee what you can't deliver. Make sure to manage expectations and be clear on what you're able to offer. Highlight successful partnerships with other business leaders.

2. Create a template for your pitch so that you can customize it for each business. To help you with customization, research a business's website, social media feed, press releases, etc. Create a pitch that is short and concise. Pay attention to business vernacular and avoid using social service verbiage.

30 Second Business Pitch

If you craft an excellent business pitch, you will never miss another opportunity to tell a potential business partner about your program. When properly done, the business pitch is a powerful tool that highlights the unique features of your program while opening the door for additional communication. Your pitch should last as long as a typical elevator ride, or about 30 seconds. Your pitch should include intriguing details about your program and create opportunities for questions and conversation. Be prepared to customize your pitch to different audiences.

Customized 30 Second Business Pitch

The problem they face is

_____

_____

_____

The solutions you propose are

_____

_____

_____

The value you bring to the partnership is

_____

_____

_____

Suggested follow up

Your next step should be to schedule a follow up call with the recruiter of the company, recap the needs mentioned above, and propose an action plan to move forward.

You can also emphasize some of the services that your graduates receive that make them more marketable. Follow up with more questions.

Questions to consider before approaching a business

- What is the company mission?

- How many openings do they have that you can fill?

- How many locations do they have?

- How quickly can you turn their hiring needs around?

- How are they planning to grow/expand? What are their goals for the future?

Developing and Improving Marketing Materials

Marketing is a major component of any program's outreach efforts. The strongest marketing campaigns use engaging materials and business-oriented messaging. The materials should not be the same as those that you use for student recruitment or for increasing overall visibility in your community (see the next page for more detail). Instead, the materials should be carefully crafted to speak to the interests of the business community.

In order to determine the message you are sending with your online and print marketing materials, ask yourself:

- Are they current?

- Are they visually appealing? Do they look professional?

- Do they answer questions businesses would ask?

- Do they adequately express your program's overall value proposition?

- Do they contain success stories including testimonials from employers who have hired your graduates or accessed your services?

- Do they have a brand identity and show positive images of your students?

- Is there clearly displayed and accurate contact information that a business representative can use to follow up with a staff member from the program for more information?

Consider the audience of your marketing materials. Those intended for the general public should be different than those aimed at the business community.

General public marketing materials should include:

- Course offerings

- Special program highlights

- Specific outcomes

- Student/employer testimonials

- Pictures of students and employers

- Contact information

Business marketing materials should include:

- Employer testimonials who have hired your graduates

- Pictures of employers and students happily interacting in a workplace environment

- Graduate and employee retention rates that you are proud of

- Special program features, highlighting credentials, certificates, etc.

- Contact information

With all of the competition out there, an employer doesn't need to work with you, but they will be interested in partnering with you if they see value in doing so. Stick to compelling marketing materials and messaging that are engaging, inspirational, results-oriented, and really set you apart from the rest.

Marketing Your Program

There are many different ways to distribute your marketing materials to reach a wider audience. Here are some ways to market your program:

- Create strategic opportunities to raise your program's visibility by posting advertisements in the newspaper, developing brochures, and getting coverage in newsletters and on your partners' websites. Make sure to keep your website current.

- Join and participate in preexisting networking events, industry association meetings, your local chamber of commerce meetings, and Meetup groups. See the following pages for suggestions of specific groups to join.

- Ask your partners and prospective partners to share materials such as a program overview, brochures, program website, etc., with other businesses.

- Where appropriate, use professional interactions and networking opportunities to tell others about your program and to meet prospective partners.

- Organize special events at your college which focus on relevant topics for your program. For example, you can organize a guest speaker series and invite local business leaders, or an awards event to show appreciation for your partners, and/or industry focus groups. These types of events offer important forums, where you can distribute materials about your program.

- Build a network of "go-to" organizations and individuals that you know will share your materials and help get the word out.

Events & Activities

Become a workforce socialite and make sure to attend some of the city's top professional events, and join groups that will expand your network. You never know who you will meet!

Networking Events

Event Brite – a global marketplace for live experiences that allows people to find and create events in 190 countries.
https://www.eventbrite.com/d/ny--new-york/networking/

Brazen Careerist – connects users to interactive communication platform experiences and networking events.
http://www.brazencareerist.com/blog/2014/02/06/9-fabulous-networking-events-in-new-york-city/

Network After Work – organizes networking events.
http://www.networkafterwork.com/city/new-york

New York City Employment and Training Coalition – promotes effective training practice, and works with state and local workforce development policymakers.
http://www.nycetc.org/

Workforce Investment Board Meetings – All meetings of the New York City Workforce Investment Board (WIB) are open to the public to observe.
http://www.nyc.gov/

Business Councils

The Business Council of New York State, Inc. – is the leading business organization in New York, representing the interest of thousands of large and small firms across the state.
http://www.bcnys.org/inside/associations.htm

Industry Specific Groups

NYS Association of Healthcare Providers – a trade association that represents organizations providing home care services for New York. https://www.nyshcp.org/

Greater New York Hospital Association – a trade association comprising nearly 250 hospitals and continuing care facilities, both voluntary and public, in the metropolitan New York area and throughout the state, as well as New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. http://www.gnyha.org/

New York State Restaurant Association – represents some 50,000 members throughout New York State. http://www.nysra.org/

The NY Technology Council (NYTECH) – is a membership-driven, 501(c)(6) non-profit organization focused on developing and promoting the technology industry in New York City. https://www.nytech.org/

Meetup Groups

Visit www.meetup.com and search for groups that focus on job seekers, professional networking, specific industries, and businesses. Below are some of the Meetup Groups in NYC that you might be interested in joining:

- The NYC Recruiting Meetup Group
- NY Career Meetup
- NY Tech Meetup
- Hotel Industry Meetup
- BOND Professional Networking Meetup
- NYC Networking Events for Professionals Meetup

Chamber of Commerce Groups In New York

Joining a few chamber of commerce groups would serve you in many different ways. Your membership would help get your program name out there, create networking opportunities with businesses, and connect you to employers.

Chamber groups host networking events, fundraisers, workshops, and other activities, all with the aim of connecting local business owners and key stakeholders.

Here is a list of just a few of the groups you should look into:

- Greater New York Chamber of Commerce
- Manhattan Chamber of Commerce
- Queens Chamber of Commerce
- Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce
- Bronx Chamber of Commerce
- New York Women's Chamber of Commerce
- New York City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

Workforce Development Organizations

Workforce groups are great for resource sharing and staying abreast of NYC's changing needs. Consider joining or attending events offered by the following organizations:

- New York City Employment & Training Coalition (NYCETC)
- Workforce Professionals Training Institute (WPTI)
- JobsFirstNYC

Using Social Media to Market Your Program

Enhance your marketing strategy by using the social media outlets that serve your approach best. Every social media platform serves a different purpose and draws a distinctive audience. Creating content that is engaging and relevant will build your social network profile. Here are three platforms that you should start with:

Create a Facebook page and share content that includes images and posts about special activities that feature your business partners, students, and alumni such as: partner news updates, student tours and site visits hosted by your partners, and any relevant employer-student interactions. Most people respond to posts that contain images rather than wordy content. Track your page performance on Facebook Insights, and use your results to help you make effective marketing decisions.

Optimize your Twitter account by keeping your program information updated, with links to your website. Follow relevant influencers and experts in your industry of focus and within workforce development. Tweet regularly and ask your followers to retweet, mention, or share your content with a fresh tweet.

LinkedIn can be used as a tool to market your program, while connecting you with local business partners online and establishing an array of useful contacts. Join LinkedIn groups and target those relevant to your program's industry of focus. When choosing a group, look at the level of member engagement activity and also the amount of discussion the posts are producing. By engaging and tracking posts, you can look for opportunities to be a resource, answer questions, and offer expertise. The more active you are, the more people will want to visit your page. This level of engagement can lead to dialogue about your program and services, which in turn could lead to more opportunities and partnerships.

Social Media Tips

- Define your goals and your target audience

- Keep your page updated; gather and share information

- Post content that features your partners and your students

- Share other people's content, reply, comment and like your partners' posts

- Encourage businesses to follow you on social media

- Monitor posts by participants and grads for appropriate content

Making Connections

assessing

visibility

Building Relationships

trust

opportunities

Nuturing Relationships

collaboration

proactive

Deepening Relationships

IV   Managing Relationships with Business Partners

After you have begun engaging with businesses and cultivating relationships, the next step is to think about how you will manage those relationships over time. Managing business and industry relationships is an active process. Your business relationships can be categorized into four different levels.

I. Making Connections– In the early stage of your relationship building you will be meeting as many business representatives as possible and assessing the needs of their companies. This requires increasing visibility of your program.

II. Building Relationships– Next, your goal is to build on the most promising connections and establish trust with these prospects by frequently providing information and opportunities to collaborate.

III. Nurturing Relationships– Some contacts will lead to collaboration. You must be proactive, consistent, and a dependable resource to partners by staying on top of changing business needs and requests.

IV. Deepening Relationships– Once mutual trust has been established and interests are shared between you and your partner, begin to explore other concrete ways to work together.
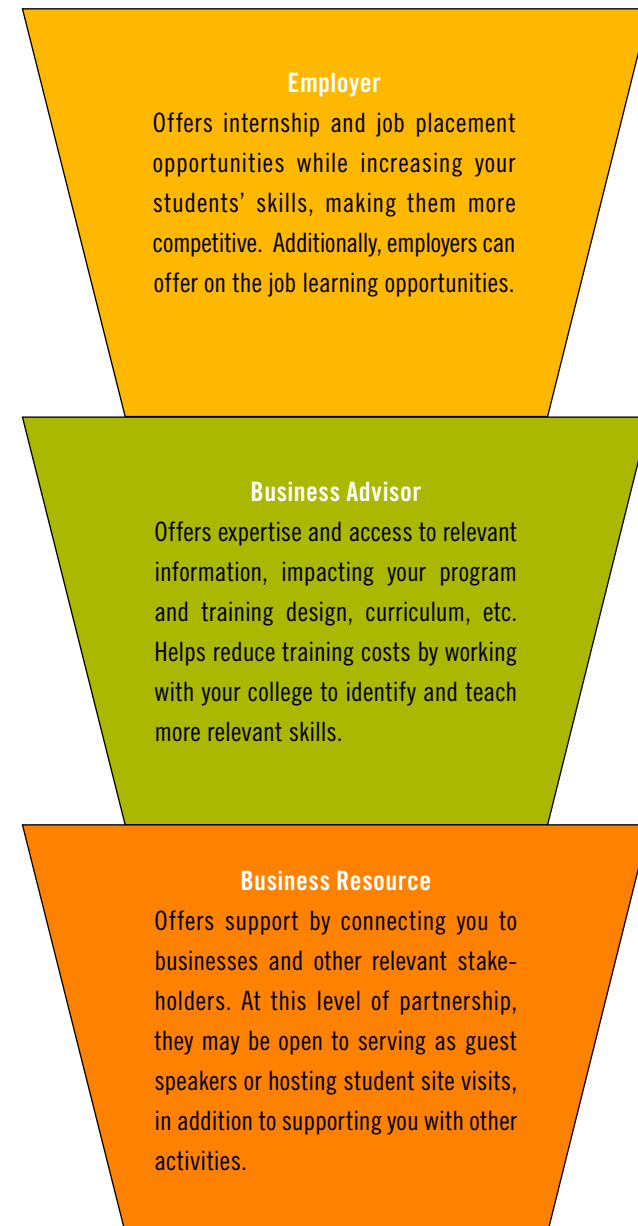
1. Making Connections

Making connections with various businesses across a broad spectrum of industries is a great strategy to expand your reach to a wide audience. Given that there is a lot at stake for you, you must be tactful, strategic, and intentional when interacting with these stakeholders.

You must continue to connect with businesses that you have not yet worked with and increase your program's visibility in your local community. Be open to trying new things like reaching out to businesses you normally would not and using new marketing tools. Identify and target different sized employers. Also, connect with business leaders who are recognized as experts in their industry. They could be an excellent resource of market intelligence or could introduce you to representatives at other companies.

Before connecting with employers you should do extensive research on companies in the occupations and sectors that your program focuses on. Visit their websites, follow their social media feeds, skim company reports, and read recent press coverage. After you have gathered enough information, meet as many people as possible—through social networks, professional forums, and in the nearby community.

Business Relationship Buckets

Employer
Offers internship and job placement opportunities while increasing your students' skills, making them more competitive. Additionally, employers can offer on the job learning opportunities.

Business Advisor
Offers expertise and access to relevant information, impacting your program and training design, curriculum, etc. Helps reduce training costs by working with your college to identify and teach more relevant skills.

Business Resource
Offers support by connecting you to businesses and other relevant stakeholders. At this level of partnership, they may be open to serving as guest speakers or hosting student site visits, in addition to supporting you with other activities.

Best Practices

- **Create** a list of businesses to contact and set a target number of businesses you will reach out to on a weekly basis. Continue to contact them periodically even if you don't have immediate success. Use LinkedIn and your college's network to identify opportunities to be referred directly to key industry staff.

- **First impressions** have a long lasting effect. You have 15 seconds to keep a prospective business partner engaged and interested. Be on point with your overall presentation.

- **Listen actively** to businesses and display a desire to learn more about what they do, their needs, and their values.

- **Be prepared** to do your 30-second pitch; however, wait for an appropriate opening in the conversation. While it is important to market your program, it should not be the singular focus of your conversations while networking. Show an interest in others and their companies.

- **Attend professional networking events** within your program's sector or industry. To get started, join the networking groups mentioned in chapter 3.

- **Sign up** for business newsletters and stay current on trends.

- **Research** and sign up for special events hosted by industry leaders and business experts.

- **Always ask** for a business card and leave yours behind.

Questions to consider

- What kind of companies do you want to target?

- What type of services or products do they deliver?

- How big are the companies you are targeting? How many employees do they have?

- What is their market reach? Are they planning to expand?

- Do they have a lot of job openings? If so, what are the educational requirements for these jobs? What skills are they looking for?
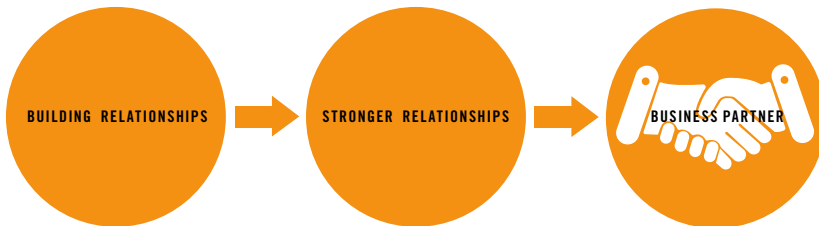
2. Building Relationships

Making connections with businesses is a start but there is more to establishing a strong partnership.

Make sure to set aside enough time to follow up with those employers that you initially met. Provide information, give updates, and suggest ways to collaborate.

Prioritize your list of contacts by reaching out to those businesses that have a need that immediately aligns with your program. If you know that you have a number of qualified students graduating shortly, contact the companies that need to hire employees immediately. If your program is rewriting a curriculum, contact the businesses that would be most interested and helpful in the curriculum design process.

However, do not ignore the businesses that could be good partners down the road. Keep in mind that there may not always be immediate opportunities for collaboration with new business contacts. However, by consistently sharing information on your program's progress and successes, you are keeping the lines of communication open for future possibilities.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS → STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS → BUSINESS PARTNER

Best Practice for Building Relationships

- Make sure to clearly explain roles and expectations to prospective partners.

- Be proactive and initiate regular check-ins with businesses on the phone or in person. Schedule site visits to get a sense of their workplace culture, business operations, and customer base.

- Get to know your prospects personally and customize the way in which you communicate. Each business representative will have his or her preferred method and frequency.

- Identify challenges that a business may have and be part of the solution.

- Extend invitations to your prospective partners to attend graduations and special events, serve as guest speakers or on panel discussions at your college—but understand if a business representative does not choose to join.

- Close your conversation with next steps and follow up promptly.

- Manage resistance effectively. Don't take rejection personally. Instead, use it as an opportunity to acknowledge concerns and answer any questions. The information that you learn from an uninterested or resistant business can be used to improve your relationship with your other partners.

Use Information

Questions to consider

- Have you prioritized your business prospects?

- Are you reserving time on your calendar to schedule regular check-ins with your prospective partners?

- Are your students aware of the companies you are developing relationships with? Are you relaying what you are learning about these companies to your students and colleagues?

- Are your students interested in and prepared to join these companies?

Sample Questions to ask Employers

- What are your business goals/plan for expansion?

- How many employees do you currently have?

- What are your current hiring needs?

- What occupational competencies, educational/training background, and skills do you expect strong candidates to have for these positions?

- Do you have any persistent skills gaps? If so, what are they?

  Add more questions based on your situation and program needs as you see fit.

3. Nurturing Relationships

After a business representative knows and trusts you, the relationship building process can begin to focus on collaborating beyond immediate needs. Talk in detail about working together over the long term. Identify concrete projects and opportunities for further engagement. Remind businesses of the services that you offer and make them aware of any new initiatives or programs that your college may be developing.

Also, remember to pay attention to your potential partner's interests and actively try to find ways to cater to those interests. You may not be able to give a prospect everything he/she wants all the time, but genuinely making the effort demonstrates your appreciation and consideration of the partnerships. This helps keep prospective partners interested.

A key approach to nurturing relationships is simply to ask relevant questions and pay attention to businesses' answers, concerns, and challenges. Instead of sharing only your perspective, encourage your partners to share their perspectives and challenges. Industries' and businesses' workforce and skill needs are constantly evolving. Consider developing and delivering customized trainings targeted to a particular sector or subsector. Additionally, you could share information about economic development and business resources hosted throughout CUNY or invite them to be part of special grant opportunities, advisory boards, and workforce committees. Identify ways to help prospects stay connected to your program so you can contact them when the right opportunity arises.

Ask Questions
Share Information
Identify Ways to Help

There are so many opportunities that you can take advantage of as your relationships grow. Here is a breakdown of some of the roles business can play.

Businesses as Advisors	Businesses as Employer Partners	Businesses as Resources
Respond to surveys and share industry labor market information.	Offer internships and work-based learning opportunities.	Serve as guest speakers or as panelists.
Partners attend meetings focused on program and training design, curricula, etc.	Employers help identify critical competencies and skills needed for relevant occupations.	Mock interview students.
Help reduce training costs by helping your college teach industry relevant skills.	Provide job placement opportunities and training.	Provide support letters for grant proposal applications.
Make connections to other industry professionals.	Works with your college to address current and projected workforce needs.	Provide connections to other businesses that have the potential to collaborate with your program.
Are continuously involved in program design and refinement, and to serve as a resource for other program needs.	Are continuously involved in program design and refinement, and to serve as a resource for other program needs.	Offer assistance such as offering space, volunteers, and in some cases donations.

How to Seal the Deal

There are numerous ways to engage your prospective partners and get them to the next level of engagement, which is partnership. As your relationships grow and evolve, it is important to maintain a level of open and honest communication. Therefore you should ask your business network for feedback and be open to constructive criticism. This information can be collected through informal conversations, employer advisory boards, semi-annual/annual focus groups, and/or employer outreach surveys on a semi-annual/annual basis. Here are some key questions you should be asking:

Partnership satisfaction – Are they satisfied with the partnership? What do they value the most? What areas would they like improved?

Quality of candidates – Do the students meet the qualifications required for the job? Do they have the skills, competencies, and training that the employer seeks?

Feedback on candidates – Are the candidates a good fit for the company? Do they meet the company's expectations?

General feedback – Provide a space for them to include additional comments or feedback about the relationship over all.

This survey data can help you evaluate the effectiveness of your relationships and determine if there are any changes or improvements that you need to make.

Best Practices

- **Ask** partners questions and actively listen to responses. When possible, incorporate their feedback into your program's activities and planning processes.

- **Encourage** business participation by inviting your partners to attend special events, serve as mentors, and help facilitate or host industry-specific meetings. Highlight your partners on your social media accounts or in more formal ways.

- **Always follow up** with them after their participation in any activities that involve your program or students.

- **Create** work plans, establish clear roles and follow up.

- **Make site visits** and check in with prospective partners in person. If students have been placed with an employer, ask about the students' job performance.

Questions to Consider

- Have you been following up with your partners?

- Have you identified multiple ways to stay connected with your partner and meet them on a frequent basis?

- Do you have a system in place to acquire feedback from your partners periodically? If so, how are you using their feedback to evaluate your relationships and try different approaches when needed?

- Have you made job placements? If so, have you followed up with your partners to see if things are working out?

- How are you recognizing your partners for their efforts and impact on your college and the community?

4. Deepening Relationships

Developing deep and meaningful relationships with local business and industry should be part of your program's long-term goals. This last stage is the level of relationship that you should aim to reach with all your prospects– partnership. Partnership happens when both you and your business partners are actively working together on a consistent basis to help each reach mutually beneficial goals. Your business partners are that select group of companies or individuals who are always there offering support, advice, and opportunities for your program and your participants.

There are no cookie-cutter methods for partnership-building. Each partnership is unique in its needs, its members and its context, and will vary depending on priorities and levels of interest. However, an important factor in how your partnerships will develop will be potential partners' experiences with your program to date. Whether it is regarding previous job placements or their involvement as a guest speaker at an event, if their prior experiences have been positive, businesses will be more likely to seek out an active partnership with your program.

At this level your partners should look to you as a trusted and valued business resource, and you should see your partners as advisors, potential employers, and important sources of business and labor market intelligence. Meet with your partners as frequently as they like to discuss priority areas such as industry trends, emerging skill needs, and hiring. Ask partners to suggest program improvements and strategic directions. Encourage them to assist with advocating for your program with other business owners, government officials, or funders.

The opportunities for collaboration and expansion of your partnerships are endless.

Partner Activities

Effective communication and frequent engagement with partners is essential. Always be specific and realistic about your "asks". Keep your partners engaged by scheduling structured times to meet individually and as a larger group. Create an annual calendar that includes regularly occurring activities such as meetings, business round tables, job fairs, and special events, so that partners can better plan their participation. Many programs create special opportunities such as industry advisories to create a structured way to engage with partners and get their input on program topics. If you are interested in creating an advisory board, you should aim for a good balance between business and program representation. Your boards/committee members might include:

- employers
- program relevant business representatives
- industry specialists
- faculty and key administrators
- Program graduates

Your partners can be involved in all sorts of programmatic activities, it is just a matter of showing them that it is worth their time and effort. Below is a list of activities, some of which were mentioned throughout this guide, that your partners should be encouraged to participate in:

- serve as advisors
- help with program design and curriculum development
- serve as a source of business intelligence
- support in policy work
- connect graduates to jobs
- host job fairs
- provide internships and job shadowing opportunities

Best Practices

- **Always** look for new and different ways to keep partners engaged.

- **Invite** business representatives to be involved in your program design, curriculum development process, or future grant opportunities.

- **Acknowledge** business partners for their contributions and partnership by hosting a special recognition ceremony, sending them thank you notes, and highlighting their contributions in your newsletter.

- **Customize** your partnership based on the business needs and preferences.

- **Meet** with your partners on a regular basis and identify priority areas.

- **Organize** and share an annual calendar of events that includes important meetings and activities.

- **Leverage** your existing partnerships and maximize opportunities.

- **Be specific** and thoughtful about your "asks" from partners.

- **Solicit** feedback from your partners and be open to constructive criticism.

V Assessing and Evaluating Business Engagement Outcomes

Measuring Success

Measuring and assessing your business engagement outcomes is essential to your success. Your activities and outcomes should be evaluated over both the short-term and long-term. As you begin your work, it is important to clarify your objectives and goals including specific changes to different industries and companies that are expected. Concrete goals will help you measure progress and evaluate the effectiveness of your strategies and allow you to make informed decisions about next steps.

Your goals should be consistent with what could be realistic expectations of what you will be able to accomplish. They will provide the foundation for all subsequent business engagement activities.

The activities that you engage in will support you in meeting your expected goals. Therefore be intentional about your business engagement activities and invest your time and energy wisely.

The program indicators show your progress.

Your evaluation process should include:

- Periodic assessments of your partnerships which includes verification of the number, diversity, quality, and participation of partners.

- Periodic assessments of business engagement activities such as meetings, special events, etc.

- Comparison of outcomes to goals such as job placements, new partnerships, internships, and new trainings developed.

- Provide leverage and make space for adjustments as you see fit in order to meet your outcomes.

business engagement · process · participation · project · evaluation · partnerships · assessment · adjustments · goals · outcomes

Evaluating Business Relationships

Evaluate your relationships based on your experiences with them and where you think they stand. Committed partners do tremendous things for your program. They open doors of opportunities, are actively engaged and communicate on a frequent basis, are loyal, and are deeply invested in the relationship. The skills and resources each partner brings to the table are very important, and the key to an effective partnership is to establish and maintain trust.

It is important to acknowledge and reward your strong partners and go the extra mile to really show your appreciation. How do you acknowledge your partners? Say thank you by hosting special award ceremonies, sending them thank you notes, calling them to see how they're doing, and any way that you can think of that would really show how much you value these relationships. Partners will not only feel valued but will also want to keep working with you, because of your integrity and character.

You may also have relationships that may not be as strong but definitely have the potential to grow into something better. Think about the reasons why these relationships aren't strong or why they may be inconsistent, and develop a new approach and strategy to engage them. Think about when they have been disengaged or inconsistent- is it due to a busy time, staff transition, etc. It's important to consider the style and preference of communication, and this may be one way to potentially make these relationships better. Only you will know the best approach.

What if you've tried everything to strengthen your relationships and make them stronger, but you're still not getting the results you're looking for?

You may experience situations in which you try everything to engage these relationships, to meet their needs and expectations, but still the relationship is going no where, even though you've done everything that needed to be done on your part. It will be up to you to determine which of your relationships fits into this category. If you've tried everything then don't keep investing your time and resources into these relationships. Keep them in your circle because things could always change, but invest your energy into relationships that are working and have the potential to grow.

Tracking Metrics

Identify a system to keep track of your metrics/outcomes. Create your own database or excel spreadsheet or use a program-specific one. Not only do you want a central place to store your business contact information, you also want to track your outreach and networking activities by week, month, and year, and student outcomes including number of interviews, job placements, job retention, and wage increases. Review these to help you determine in what ways your work has been successful and in what ways it needs improvement.

VI Summary

Strategic, comprehensive, and continuous business engagement is challenging and time consuming. Developing and cultivating strong relationships with business partners, demands time and energy, resources, and commitment, which are central to our University's mission. As discussed throughout the guide, continuous and successful business engagement requires a strategic approach and should be considered a priority in order to help you successfully meet your goals. These partnerships support our efforts to meet our goals, meet workforce needs, and serve CUNY students. There are a variety of ways for CUNY and businesses collaborate. Some key things to remember about effective business engagement are:

Know Your Program and the Labor Market

Stay well-informed about workforce trends and up-to-date on labor market information. Research your program and know it thoroughly.

Create a Plan

Before reaching out to businesses, create a realistic engagement plan and a timeline. Inventory the businesses with which you have connections and prioritize your partnerships and industry sectors. Seek applicable training for yourself and your team members. Evaluate your business engagement strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Engage Businesses

Identify challenges business are facing and determine ways you and your program can meet them. Prepare a pitch that starts with a hook, establishes understanding, and prompts a next step from your business contact. Customize the pitch to a particular employer and person. Closely review all of your existing marketing materials to make sure they are current and eye catching. Create a schedule for yourself of professional and networking events that you think would be beneficial to attend so you can try out your pitch and distribute materials.

Be Solutions-Oriented

Businesses appreciate when their partners can offer solutions for their challenges. Take the time to understand their challenges and offer solutions that are customized to their needs. Identify opportunities where you could potentially offer additional resources. Quantify the value of your services so you can share the information with other potential partners.

Position Yourself as a Valuable Partner

Be clear about the value your program offers, and how much money you could potentially save a business with your services. Provide data on the labor market and workforce trends. Stay up-to-date on industry trends and identify skills upgrade training opportunities for incumbent workers.

Manage Business Relationships

Make connections with as many businesses as possible; continue to seek new opportunities to make new contacts. At the same time, keep your existing business contacts and partners engaged.

In order to build your relationships, ask questions about the company's needs and check in with business contacts and partners on a regular basis. Nurture your relationships by being consistent and staying on top of business needs and requests. Solicit feedback from your partners using surveys, scheduling phone calls, and regular in person check-ins and use the information they provide to improve your work. Finally, make it a priority to acknowledge and recognize your partners for their contributions and support.

Evaluate Your Outcomes

Monitor your progress to determine the business engagement methods that are working and methods that could be tweaked or changed.

VII References

Altria Corporate Services, Inc. (2004). Stakeholder engagement panning toolkit. Henrico County, VA: Author. Retrieved from http://www.forumstrategies.com/content/pdf/stakeholder_engagement.pdf

Bond, D. (2013). Engaging Employers to Support Adult Career Pathways Programs. Waco, TX: Center for Occupational Research and Development. Retrieved from http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/acp/Engaging_Employers_IssueBrief. pdf

Commonwealth Corporation. (2013). Strategic Employer Engagement: Building Dynamic Relationships with Employers in Teen and Young Adult Employment Programs. Boston, MA: Author. Retrieved from http://commcorp.org/resources/documents/Employer%20Engagement%20 Guide%2004.2013.pdf

Holm, R. & Vollman, J. (June 2012). Employer Engagement: A Business Plan for Further Education and Training Colleges. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Retrieved from http://www.jff.org/publications/employer-engagement-business-plan-further-education-and-training-colleges

Martinson, K. (2010). Partnering Employers to Promote Job Advancement for Low-Skill Individuals. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/412309-Promote-Job-Advancement.pdf

Wilson, R. (January 2015). A Resource Guide to Engaging Employers. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Retrieved from http://www.jff.org/publications/resource-guide-engaging-employers