



WORK-BASED LEARNING

A Talent Development Opportunity for Your Small Business

AT A GLANCE

This guide provides employers with the business case for offering work-based learning at your small business. Five key reasons explain how businesses can increase your impact—on the bottom line and the community. It contains a how-to guide to get started, what organizations and people to partner with, and other resources.

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Small Business Majority was founded and is run by small business owners to ensure America's entrepreneurs are a key part of a thriving and inclusive economy. Our extensive scientific polling, focus groups, and economic research help us educate and inform policymakers, the media, and other stakeholders about key issues impacting small businesses and freelancers, including access to capital, healthcare, retirement, taxes, paid leave, and other workforce issues.

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INTRODUCTION

We know that, as business owners, you're always looking for the best talent, but it can be hard to come by. If you own or operate a small business, having access to a qualified workforce is critical for your success. Colleges, schools, community-based organizations, and adult workforce training programs are great local sources to help you find and develop the talent you need. But these sources need close partnership with you—the local businesses—to help make these connections. This guide describes how small business owners can work with local education and workforce training practitioners to develop a talented local workforce through work-based learning.

WHAT IS WORK-BASED LEARNING?

Work-based learning models enable employers to train current and prospective employees to meet their individual business needs. They consist of workplace experiences that enable students and workers to gain and practice the knowledge and skills they need to enter and advance in specific careers. Importantly, learners perform meaningful job tasks at the worksite under the guidance of a qualified supervisor. This helps ensure a worthwhile learning experience while providing an important contribution to the business.

Work-based learning experiences can include exposing high school students to careers through job shadowing or internships. It also may include providing current employees with specialized training that prepares them for new roles or responsibilities and adopting a registered apprenticeship model that combines credit-bearing courses with work.

Employers can design their own work-based learning opportunities by partnering with a high school or community college and/or collaborating with a community-based organization. Employers can also target specific population groups if desired, such as low-income youth, people with disabilities, people with criminal histories, the long-term unemployed, or mature workers. These models can serve as both an entrance to the workforce and an opportunity to train incumbent workers.¹

CAREER EXPERIENCE

SPECIFIC SKILLS | PERMANENT EMPLOYMENT

Engages individuals as paid workers to gain specific skills, in conjunction with related classroom or lab instruction, in a particular industry or occupation.

Models include:

- Registered Apprenticeships
- Youth Apprenticeship
- Other Forms of Apprenticeships
- Transitional Jobs
- On-the-Job Training
- Work-Based Courses

CAREER EXPOSURE

INDUSTRY INTRO | SHORT-TERM

Brings participants to workplaces for short periods of time with the goal of gaining introductory information about an industry and associated occupations.

Models include:

- Job Shadows
- Company Tours
- Mentoring
- Simulations
- Information Interviews

CAREER ENGAGEMENT

BASIC TECHNICAL & EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Provides extended opportunities for participants to increase their knowledge of an identified field of interest and gain employability skills and some entry-level technical knowledge or skills.

Models include:

- Internships
- Pre-Apprenticeships
- Apprenticeship Readiness
- Cooperative Education
- Service Learning

WORK-BASED LEARNING

PREPARATION FOR
WORK-BASED LEARNING

CAREER EXPLORATION

AWARENESS | FOUNDATION | PREPARATION

Builds awareness of careers. Career exploration activities do not take place in workplaces and are not work-based learning, but provide a foundation for work-based learning and prepare participants to make the most of opportunities.

Models include:

- Career Fairs
- Industry Projects
- Interest Inventories
- Mock Interviews

Visit JFF's **Center or Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning** for more information: jff.org/center.

YOUR RETURN ON INVESTMENT

5 REASONS TO OFFER WORK-BASED LEARNING



**Short-term
Productivity Increases**



**Diversity Boosts
Performance**



**Appeal to
Investors Grows**



**Support Your
Local Community**



We Need You!

There are several business reasons why employers should consider working with education and workforce partners to develop work-based learning opportunities. Their outcomes can help a business owner's bottom line by lowering costs of doing business while providing value to the local community.



SHORT-TERM PRODUCTIVITY INCREASES

More intensive work-based learning experiences, such as internships and apprenticeships, offer a cost-effective way to boost your business's capacity in the short term. With the right support and guidance, interns can complete short projects, such as research or writing assignments, develop marketing materials, test/troubleshoot products, or organize projects. To ensure an internship is a valuable learning experience, it should involve more than basic tasks. Challenge interns to leverage their classroom learning to support your business. They can be a source of fresh ideas and work strategies that benefit your bottom line.

Apprentices can bring even more value to your operation. They usually arrive with some initial training that is very specific to the job and industry. While they continue to learn on the job, they will need less ramp-up time to become productive and increase capacity for the business in the short term. Studies have shown that utilizing apprentices as a talent source reduces turnover costs and improves retention rates for both new and tenured employees as well.²



DIVERSE TALENT SOURCES CAN BOOST PERFORMANCE

Research shows businesses that have greater employee diversity outperform those that don't.³ Enhancing diversity in your employee

base offers a competitive edge because these employees give you a better grasp of your customers, and your operations will benefit from a variety of perspectives. As the United States becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, a workforce that reflects your community helps you more successfully understand and reach target customers and clients. However, employers often say that a diverse labor pool isn't available for the jobs they need to fill. Creating a work-based learning model with local education and workforce training programs can be a great resource to diversify your pre-employment pool.



YOUR APPEAL TO INVESTORS GROWS

Supporting education and workforce development programs shows a business is committed to having a positive social impact on the community. By offering work-based learning opportunities to schools, colleges, and workforce training programs, you help develop the future talent of your community. This is particularly true for those who have scarce opportunities, such as students and trainees with disabilities, those who speak English as a second language, or the formerly incarcerated. With a practical way to ground their education in the workplace, they develop into productive, loyal employees.

Mounting evidence shows companies that prioritize social impact are more financially successful, and investors are noticing.⁴ There are now several national conferences that focus on connecting socially responsible entrepreneurs with potential investors. One example is Social Capital Markets, an annual conference in San Francisco with a mission of “increasing the flow of capital toward social good.”⁵



SUPPORTING YOUR COMMUNITY BENEFITS EVERYONE

Evidence is mounting that customers and employees want to work with businesses that are committed to corporate social responsibility and diversity. It keeps customers and talent more engaged. Cone Communications found in a survey of global consumers that:⁶

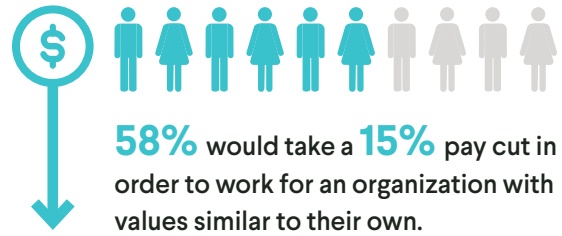


87% will purchase a product because the company advocated for an issue they cared about.



78% want companies to address important social justice issues.

Similarly, Net Impact polled students in 2012 and concluded that:⁷



These students have entered the job market and are looking for the right culture fit. You may already employ individuals from these generations who will appreciate your support of the local community.

Making a positive social impact is rapidly becoming a critical element of competitiveness. By offering meaningful and impactful work-based learning to members of your community, you are a key part of building the community and your local economy. And a strong local community and economy makes for good business.



IT CAN'T BE DONE WITHOUT YOU

Perhaps most importantly, work-based learning can't happen without your help. Students and trainees need to apply their learning in real-world settings to fully develop their understanding of concepts and specific jobs. Most students without access to these experiences will graduate with useful knowledge but no preparation to enter the evolving workforce. With our fast-paced economy, this lack of preparedness puts them at risk for falling behind, earning lackluster wages, and struggling to build a career.

Career and technical education (CTE) programs both in high schools and community colleges prepare students for particular industries. A number of workforce training programs do the same for adults. All of them need close partnerships with businesses to offer high-quality work-based learning experiences. Businesses offer the opportunity for students and trainees to learn how to apply concepts to real-world problems and gain the experience needed to be ready for a job.



How To Offer Work-Based Learning At Your Business

There are likely many different organizations and people you can reach out to in your local community to design and coordinate work-based learning opportunities, but it can be difficult to know where to begin. The types and number of organizations may vary by locale, but one or more of the following suggestions should be available to you as a resource. In each section, the learning experiences appropriate for the type of resource are listed, along with the departments and typical staff titles that will be available to help.

PARTNER WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Some “light-touch” work-based learning experiences include

- Serving as a guest speaker and educating a class about a particular career, industry, or relevant industry topic
- Offering job shadowing opportunities and workplace tours so a student (or a group of students) can visit your workplace and/or watch employees in action
- Supervising class projects to support a student or group on the design and guide them with feedback/review at the end
- Mentoring students in their studies or career development

School districts are also interested in deeper involvement from business partners

- Industry advisory boards comprised of business representatives are critical for career pathway programs. They help develop and validate curricula, evaluate and develop programming, support the offering of work-based learning, and other functions. They can be industry specific or cross industry in nature.

- Internship opportunities offer a longer-term project or role for students to produce work under close supervision and guidance. Time and length vary, but 4–8 weeks at 10–20 hours per week is standard.

WHO DO I TALK TO?

Many school districts have a CTE department, which may also be called a Linked Learning (primarily in California) or Vocational Education department. These divisions are in charge of industry-based coursework and oversee what are most commonly called “career academies” or “career pathway” programs.

The staff who may be able to help you set up these experiences include:

- CTE department directors
- Work-based learning coordinators (or specialists)
- Career academy coordinators (or specialists)

PARTNER WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community colleges' objective is providing students with education and experiences that can lead to meaningful employment. Community college administrators will confirm that business partnerships are key to their mission. Most community colleges have a workforce development department or division, and many offer short-term programs, often tied to an industry credential. Sometimes the vice presidents or directors of these departments work closely with academic departments that offer longer-term industry-specific programs (up to and including two-year degrees).

Community colleges strive to provide work-based learning that has an emphasis on more intensive career-related programs. In addition, community college programs may offer:

- Apprenticeship programs that combine paid on-the-job learning and formal classroom instruction to ensure mastery of the knowledge and skills workers need for career success
- Employer or industry advisory boards with representatives from businesses, usually specific to the industry aligned with the program, who advise on curriculum or provide help in placements for work-based learning or jobs

WHO DO I TALK TO?

You can start with contacting the workforce department or division, which may also be called the CTE department. You may also contact industry-specific programs directly (e.g., advanced manufacturing, health care, or information technology).

The staff who may be able to help you set up work-based learning experiences include:

- Vice chancellor, vice president, or director of workforce development
- Vice chancellor, vice president, or director of career and technical education
- Dean, associate dean, or department chair of workforce development
- Dean, associate dean, or department chair of career and technical education
- Industry-specific program dean and/or associate dean (e.g., dean, school of business)
- Program instructor (by industry)
- Business or employer services representative (or specialist)

PARTNER WITH PUBLIC WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAMS

Training programs for some youth, and particularly for adults, may be offered by local nonprofit or community-based organizations who serve particular populations or areas. Goodwill is an example of a nonprofit that provides these services in many communities nationally. For programs serving adults, the local workforce development board and their associated American Job Centers (AJCs) may be a good resource. They provide funding for various training programs, maintain working relationships with education and training institutions, and employ dedicated business service staff that can connect you with other non-training resources (job fairs, on-the-job training funds, etc.) in multiple regions/cities within states.

The website http://workforceinvestmentworks.com/workforce_board_finder.asp will help you find your local board and AJCs. Typically, the administrative staff at the local workforce board is best to talk to about strategic hiring, training, or expansion goals, while the AJC's team can assist with more tactical goals, such as helping you post open positions to the state job board or participate in a job fair.

WHO DO I TALK TO?

The staff who may be able to help you set up these experiences include:

- President, CEO, or executive director of the workforce development board
- Business/employer services manager
 - » Often located within the AJC
- Business/employer services representative (or specialist)
 - » Often located within the AJC
- Industry program-specific manager (e.g., biotechnology training manager)
 - » Could be AJC or administrative offices of the board, depending on organizational structure

PARTNER WITH BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS

Sometimes, business intermediaries such as chambers of commerce or industry-specific trade associations may help connect interested businesses to organizations that offer work-based learning.

WHO DO I TALK TO?

The staff who may be able to help you set up these experiences include:

- Director or manager of education
- Director or manager of workforce development (or talent development)
- Community engagement manager
- Work-based learning coordinator (or specialist)



CONCLUSION

Offering work-based learning to students and workers of all ages is an excellent opportunity for small businesses to develop a diverse talent source, support the local community and economy, and participate in activities that make sense for your bottom line. At the same time, it can build short-term capacity and attract positive attention to your business.

WORK-BASED LEARNING RESOURCES

Additional JFF resources that may be helpful include:

- [*Making Work-Based Learning Work*](#)
A broad overview of WBL, with specific examples of WBL in the field for both youth and adults, that presents the seven guiding principles according to our experience and work in the field
- [*Making Work-Based Learning Work for Retail: A Guide for Retail Employers*](#)
Provides details and examples for WBL in retail settings
- [*Not As Hard As You Think: Engaging High School Students in Work-Based Learning*](#) This guide can help answer questions about liability and other common concerns businesses may have when engaging in WBL
- For more general information about work-based learning and apprenticeships, please visit JFF's [Center for Apprenticeship and Work-Based Learning](#)

ENDNOTES

1. For more about JFF's definition of *work-based learning*, see <https://center4apprenticeship.jff.org/work-based-learning>.
2. www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/the-benefits-and-costs-of-apprenticeships-a-business-perspective.pdf
3. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>
4. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/20430795.2015.1118917>
5. <http://socialcapitalmarkets.net/about-socap/>
6. <http://www.conecomm.com/research-blog/2017-csr-study>
7. <https://www.netimpact.org/sites/default/files/documents/what-workers-want-2012-summary.pdf>



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