

BUSINESS PARTNER TOOLKIT



SPRING 2019

INTRODUCTION

The Iowa Clearinghouse for Work-Based Learning is a virtual tool that will expand access to high-quality, in-depth work-based learning in rural and urban communities for all students, especially traditionally underrepresented students, with a focus on high-demand STEM fields and careers. School-business partnerships will be created and developed through projects that make learning more relevant and authentic for students as well as also meeting the needs of the businesses.

This toolkit has been created with two goals in mind; first, to inform businesses about the importance of, and value in, engaging with students around meaningful work-based learning projects. And second, to provide guidance around creating a project, getting it into the clearinghouse and managing the project to a successful completion.

Expanding rigorous work-based learning opportunities is in keeping with Future Ready Iowa's aims. Future Ready Iowa is an initiative to prepare individuals for

dynamic careers and lifelong learning to meet employer needs and to grow family incomes and strengthen communities. It has the goal of 70 percent of Iowa's workforce to have education or training beyond high school by 2025. Learn more and read all of the recommendations on the [Future Ready Iowa](#) site.

Work-based Learning is a term that covers a range of different activities that begin with career awareness (guest speakers, career fairs), move into exploration activities (job shadowing, mentorship, authentic projects) and can grow into learning on the job site (internships, apprenticeships, etc). Authentic Learning is another term used for this type of work that leads to students developing technical knowledge, soft skills and community connections. The Iowa Department of Education has put out a Work-Based Learning Guide that provides an in-depth look at the continuum of work-based learning experiences as well as looking into roles and responsibilities, and legal and safety concerns. The guide can be accessed on the Iowa Department of Education's [Work-Based Learning page](#).



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WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR BUSINESSES?

- Build awareness of business's role in the community & economy
- Increase positive public relations opportunities and gain brand advocates
- Address projects & tasks that would otherwise not get attention
- Find help to fill a gap in your skillset
- Help create a pipeline of talent that is better-prepared and motivated
- Strengthen the leadership and supervisory skills of your current workers
- Derive value from work performed by student partners
- Learn about the knowledge and skills of tomorrow's employees by working with today's students
- Contact and observe potential future employees for part-time, summer or eventual full-time jobs in an authentic context
- Gather direct feedback about your products or services from a younger generation
- Expand views and experiences by working with different demographics through virtual connections with students statewide
- Educate young adults about the careers available to them in your company and industry.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS?

- Make connections between real world expectations and the classroom
- Pursue education with a greater sense of purpose and engagement due to seeing an increased relevance
- Interact with positive adult role models in a reduced student-adult ratio
- Understand that projects may take multiple attempts to find an acceptable solution for the business partner.
- Experience enriched opportunities to learn, perform and be recognized
- Develop essential 21st century skills (Iowa Core Universal Constructs)
- Communication and presentation
- Collaborating as part of a team
- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Creativity and innovation
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Accountability and productivity
- Find out if a career or industry might be a good match before committing time and money
- Build a network of relationships in the community
- Pursue an area of interest or passion project
- Boost self-esteem and confidence
- Realize the industries and career opportunities available in Iowa
- Experience a range of opportunities not traditional for their demographic



WHAT IS THE TIME COMMITMENT?

As the old adage says, “time is money” and time spent working with and developing our future workforce is a smart investment. That said, we realize that each organization has a different appetite regarding the amount of time they can spend interacting with student groups on these projects. The spectrum ranges from highly involved where the business is closely engaged with the project from kickoff, through frequent meetings, perhaps providing mentoring or skills instruction, all the way to wrap-up. At the other end of the spectrum, a business could create a project opportunity that calls for little to no business involvement. Once they post the project or contest information to the clearinghouse, the schools take it from there and the business isn’t involved again until completion.

Involvement from business partners can happen at the school, at the business site, or it can occur virtually with the business and students connect via video-conferencing (Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.)

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT: WHAT MAKES A HIGH-QUALITY PROJECT?

When we say “projects,” that can cover all sorts of work. There are few characteristics though, that we think every opportunity on the clearinghouse should possess. **The work needs to be authentic. Real tasks, where students own the work involving real research, real creation and ideally, a tangible service or product delivered to a real audience at the completion.**

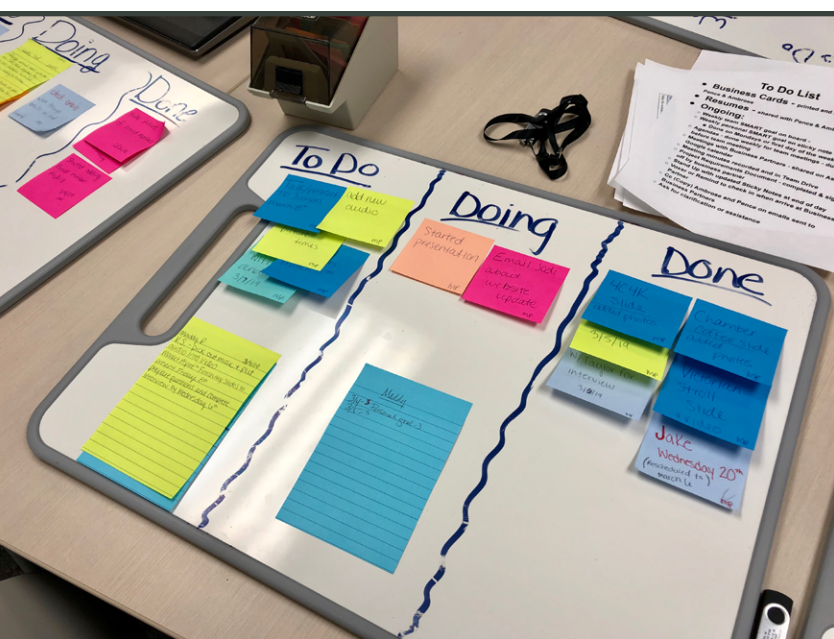
The following points come from Prepare Rhode Island’s Workforce Guidance and delve deeper into what this work should look like:

- **Rigorous:** Skill-based, and tied to measurable outcomes. The experience should allow a student to gain measurable skills, whether those be essential skills (also known as professional skills, soft skills, or 21st century skills) or hard technical skills.
- **Relevant:** Connected to a student’s interests. Projects and tasks should mirror those that exist in a real workplace.
- **Reflective:** Engages the student in reflection and analysis throughout and after the experience.
- **Interactive:** Providing multiple opportunities for students to interact with industry professionals, whether as supervisors, mentors, advisors, or collaborators.
- **Integrated:** Connected with the student’s school-based curriculum. A work-based learning experience is a practical application of academic and/or technical learning and should allow the student to practice the theory learned in the classroom in a real-world setting.

The Buck Institute for Education has an [Essential Project Design Elements Checklist](#) that can be a useful resource as you review your project idea.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT: BRAINSTORMING PROJECT IDEAS

- Are there projects toward the bottom of your to-do list that don't ever seem to get attention?
- Are there ideas that you've had but haven't been able to spare the time or the staff to explore them?
- What would you like to know about your next generation of customers? These aspiring professionals might be them!
- Could you use a fresh view from outside your organization? Use the group as consultants and let them provide an unbiased take on things.
- Are there issues or developments coming in your industry that students could begin to work on?
- Is there a process or aspect of your business that you would like to change or do differently?
- Aren't two heads better than one? Work with multiple teams at different schools on the same project! Run it as a challenge to find the best solution or have them synthesize their ideas at the finish of the project for a final collaboration exercise.
- Can you sequence several projects together with the same student groups so the experiences build on one another?
- Snowball effect - Don't be confined to what you originally wrote up the project as. If more interesting or better fitting ideas come up, let the original project grow and morph into something different and better.
- Competitions & Expos. Find a style that works for you and your project. To remove geographic and logistical scheduling issues, these formats can be carried out digitally as well. Maybe an internship or summer job is the prize!
 - Science fair-style showcase. Student groups display or present their finished projects. A judging committee of professionals can provide feedback and select a winner or winners.
 - "Shark Tank"-style pitchfest. Student groups have a set amount of time to present their ideas, deliver their elevator pitch and try to win over the judges.
 - Hack-a-thon. Student groups come together and are given a common challenge or problem. Then they collaborate, working non-stop, to devise and create solution.
- Check out some examples on these sites:
 - Iowa BIG's [project board](#)
 - Cedar Falls [CAPS](#) project request form has lots of project ideas
 - Iowa [STEM BEST programs](#)
 - Iowa STEM Externships [blogs](#) and [testimonials](#)
 - [Iowa Authentic Learning Network](#)



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Engage in proper planning and preparation.
- Address logistical details.
- Communicate with all parties.
- Maximize learning potential.
- Focus on career preparation.
- Connect to the classroom.
- Promote student reflection.

BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH STUDENTS

- Remember that you will be working with students on a school calendar. Winter break, summer vacation, snow days, etc will impact the timeline of your project.
- These disclaimers come from the Submit a Project form and ensure that all parties will start off with some key shared expectations:

- I understand that students may only participate in legal and safe opportunities in the field.
 - I understand that students will work their best to achieve project success / project fulfillment as agreed upon by the student group and partner. However, I am aware that in some cases projects may not always be successful or fulfilled. In some of these cases students will learn more from these failures.
 - I understand that our partnership requires a certain level of flexibility and mentorship.
 - I understand that this project is bound by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), meaning that personal student data cannot be shared without the consent of the student's guardians.
- For guidance on safety and insurance questions, check out the [Iowa Work-Based Learning Guide](#).



CLEARINGHOUSE USER GUIDE FOR BUSINESS PARTNERS

SHOWING INTEREST

When you click on the Interest Form link at the bottom of every page of the website, it will gather basic contact information about your business and you will be contacted with your login credentials and guidance on moving forward.

SUBMITTING A PROJECT

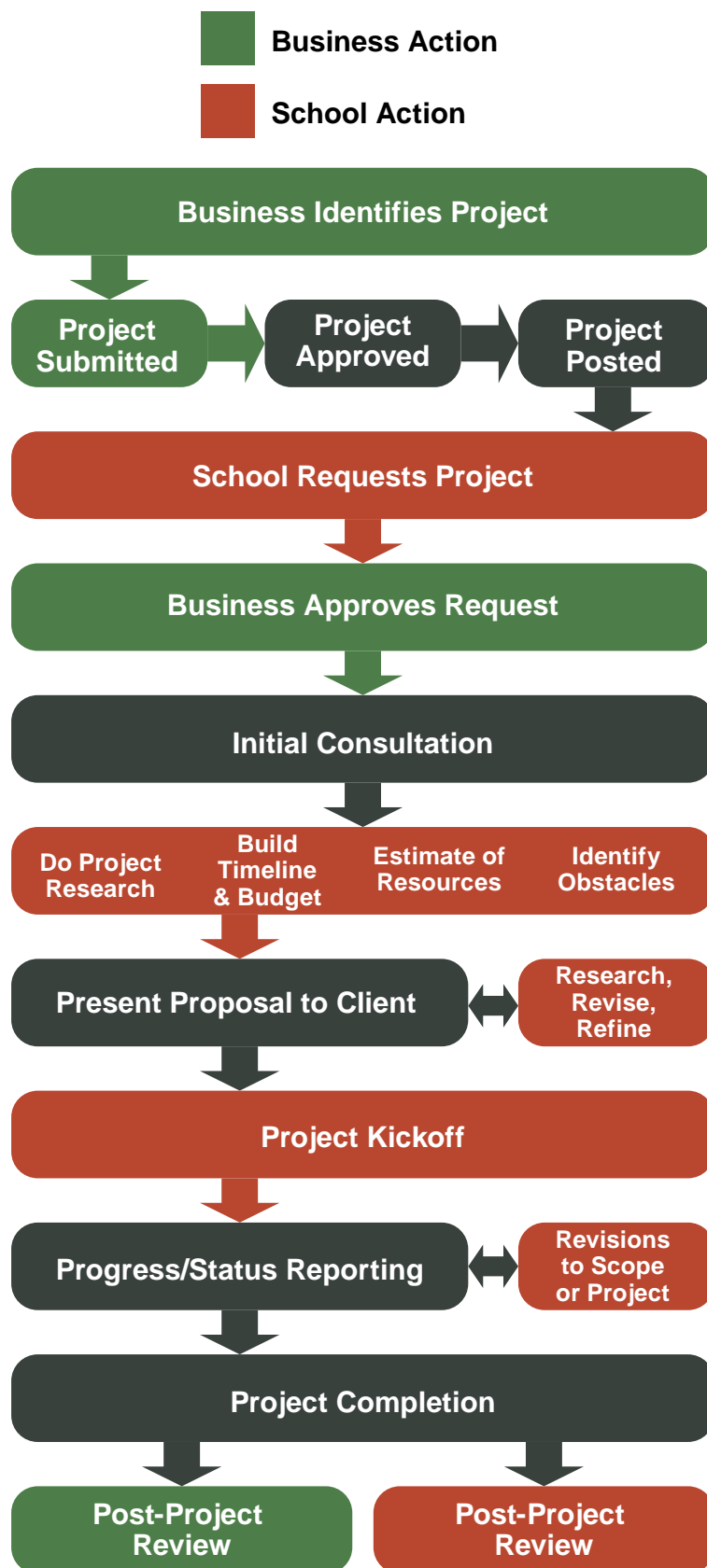
There are links to the Submit a Project form throughout the website and at the bottom of every page. This form will gather all the necessary information about your project. A pdf version of the form can be viewed [here](#). Your project will be reviewed and then posted to the clearinghouse.

NOTIFICATION THAT A SCHOOL IS INTERESTED

When a teacher or student group is interested in working with you on your project, you will receive a notification, both via email and also in your clearinghouse dashboard. You will be able to review the request and approve or deny it.

MAKING A CONNECTION

If the request sounds good and you approve it, a connection is made and you will be able to communicate with the teacher via email to determine the details and logistics for your initial meeting with the student group. Expectations, methods and frequency of meetings, information sharing tools, end date for the project, and many other particulars should be ironed out in that initial communication or first meeting.



FINISHING A PROJECT

After your project wraps up you will be sent a reminder to go into the clearinghouse dashboard and formally “complete” the project and fill out the brief feedback survey. This is your chance to log whether the project met your expectations, if you want to share your experience and if you have any photos, videos, etc of the work and the final outcome to share you can upload them or link to them here.

WHAT IF NO ONE SELECTS OUR PROJECT?

No takers? That's totally ok! That just means it's time to review, rethink, rename, and repost the project. A few thoughtful tweaks and your next version might be your best one yet!



SOURCES

Iowa Work-Based Learning Guide, Iowa Department of Education <https://educateiowa.gov/documents/iowa-work-based-learning/2017/10/iowa-work-based-learning-guide>

Quality Work-Based Learning Toolkit, Kansas City Public Schools, http://www.newwaystowork.org/qwbl/tools/kcktoolkit/print_toolkit.pdf

Work-Based Learning Toolkit, New York City Youth and Young Adult Career Pathways http://www.newwaystowork.org/uploads/files/WBL_Toolkit_rv5c_JP_11.13.17_Edits.pdf

Workplace Challenge Fact Sheet, NYC DOE Work-Based Learning Toolkit <http://wbltoolkit.cte.nyc/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/13.1.1-Workplace-Challenge-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Work-Based Learning Manual, Succeed2020, North Dakota's How-To Guide For Work-Based Learning <http://wbl.ndsucceed2020.org/introduction-to-work-based-learning/>

Workforce Guidance, Prepare Rhode Island, <https://www.prepare-ri.org/wbl/>