

## Managing Multiple Employers

The P-TECH approach includes a deliberate focus on the three facets of student capabilities needed for success in the labor force: the acquisition of academic, technical and workplace/professional skills. Regardless of industry, employers consistently underscore that students must have experience and mastery in all three areas, with a growing priority on the development of professional skills. Alongside efforts to enhance the rigor and effectiveness of classroom instruction, the P-TECH model requires new approaches to deliver authentic workplace experiences such as Career Mentoring, Workplace Tours, Workplace Challenges, Job Shadowing and Internships in partnership with employers. As P-TECH expands and grows across the state and in each local P-TECH school community, the challenge of expanding the base of employer partners can feel daunting.

Although the initial 9-14 school, P-TECH in Brooklyn, was established with a single partner company, the model has evolved as each new P-TECH school discovers new ways to expand its base of employers and sustain and grow their participation over time. In fact, the current 32 NYS P-TECH schools engaged close to 400 employer partners during the 2016/17 school year.

Currently each P-TECH school works with a consortium of employers, potentially as many as 50 local businesses, to provide leadership, curriculum advice and a growing number of WBL opportunities for students. These schools focus finding the right fit for each employer, valuing any and all engagements and maintaining a steady and well-planned employer engagement effort.

This tip sheet is intended to help share and grow those practices, and provide a guide for all P-TECH staff and partners charged with the employer engagement effort.

## What does a P-TECH school need to know about employer engagement?

***Employer engagement isn't just one person's job.*** Engaging a growing number of employers to support your P-TECH School is a team effort. Seek to involve your core employer champions, civic leaders, local elected officials, students, parents and faculty as potential members of the employer engagement team.

***P-TECH schools aren't alone in seeking to connect employers to education.*** Connect with and leverage the work of others, including the work-based learning coordinators at your school, local intermediaries, workforce entities and business/professional associations<sup>1</sup>.

***Few employers can "do it all".*** Provide a wide range of options to each potential employer, and find ways that work for them to get involved. Make sure to celebrate and recognize the value of any and all commitments. Finding the right fit today will lead to broader engagement in the future.

***Employers and community partners outside of your target industry have something to offer.*** A wide range of community and business partners can serve as a resource to your P-TECH school,

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<sup>1</sup> These include BOCES, Regional EDCs, Chambers of Commerce, Manufacturing Expansion Projects, Work-Based Learning Coordinators, Academy programs, Trade Associations, the Workforce Development System, Workforce Intermediaries and others.

even if outside your P-TECH industry. Any and all experiences can support the development of professional skills, and many professional adults can serve as career mentors.

***Managing multiple relationships requires focus and organization.*** Build a strong team and decide how to best support the engagement effort. Set aside time each day to focus on responding to employer interest, use a customer relations data base to help manage your communications and set regular meetings with your advisors and team members. Be persistent and consistent in your efforts, and continually network in professional and business circles.

***Recruiting employers is essentially a marketing and sales function,*** while sustaining those relationships is based on delivering high-quality customer service. Get comfortable with seeing yourself as a marketing and sales professional. NYS P-TECH has created the P-TECH Employer Engagement Quick Guide to help P-TECH schools and their partners and team members support the employer engagement process. The guide is designed to help P-TECH teachers, school leaders, work-based learning coordinators and their community or intermediary partners effectively recruit and engage a range of employers to support their work. It includes five key organizational strategies schools can use to support the employer engagement effort, and four simple steps P-TECH coordinators can take to increase their capacity in recruiting employers.

### **What's working at the current P-TECH Schools?**

In the Spring of 2017, NYS P-TECH interviewed team members responsible for employer engagement from five P-TECH schools. While each school has taken a slightly different approach to the need to engage a range of employers in the work, all five share some common themes in their approach.

Their advice to other P-TECH schools includes the following common elements:

- ***Set aside time*** for employer engagement and protect it.
- ***Employ a marketing and sales approach.*** Employers are customers as well as partners.
- ***Look for “non-traditional” partners.*** Many businesses and organizations are positioned to support your work, even if not in your industry focus area.
- ***Provide multiple opportunities*** and easy ways for employers to participate.
- ***Keep at it.*** A no today can be a yes tomorrow.
- ***Leverage the work of others.*** You are not alone in the employer engagement effort.

### **This what they told us....**

#### **Leverage faculty networks and engage students.**

P-TECH OHM in the Mohawk Valley offers career pathways in Advanced Manufacturing. The school's Guidance Counselor is responsible for organizing work-based learning and engaging their employer partners – now close to 40 individuals from almost 15 companies. At the beginning of the year, the counselor spends the majority of their time in this role. By leveraging faculty networks and including employer engagement as part of the student's responsibilities for 10<sup>th</sup> grade workplace challenges, the counselor can spend most of their time on traditional counseling activities. The key to employer engagement – flexibility. Share a wide range of opportunities and find a way to get them started. Once they meet the students, the commitment always grows.

**Set aside time each day to focus on managing employer relationships.**

Hudson Valley P-TECH also depends on their Guidance Counselor for employer engagement, who now has 15 star volunteers from a distribution list of more than 60 individuals from more than 40 local companies for their career pathways in IT and Green Industries. The counselor spends about 30% of their time on this role, but reminds us that includes at least some time every day to be responsive to employer contacts and follow up on opportunities. The counselor has also found that the local Business Association is a great resource of networking events and marketing opportunities, even though they are not an official intermediary partner. Best advice – never accept no for an answer – keep offering different types of activities and schedules. Keep everyone on your distribution list – they may not have time this quarter, but they will in the future.

**Connect to and leverage the work of an Industry Association.**

Both Syracuse P-TECH and Auburn P-TECH partner with Partners in Education and Business, an affiliate of MACNY – Manufacturers Association of Central New York. MACNY has already engaged 62 of their 300 members to participate, leveraging their visibility in the local business community and their track record with other public/private partnerships. This is sales and standard project management to keep track of all of the details and moving parts. “P-TECH is the most direct pathway for employers to build a talent pipeline,” according to one of the staff member. And the other advises, “Sometimes the wide range of activities and opportunities for employers can be overwhelming. But that’s the key to engagement – there’s always a fit for everyone. No is not an option, just keep making a new offer.”

**Ongoing communications efforts are key.**

The Fulton Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce works with two schools, focusing on very different sets of employers – HFM P-TECH with pathways in manufacturing, IT, and health careers and HFM Ag P-TECH serving the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century agriculture. The P-TECH liaison spends 2 days each week with each school, wrangling more than 60 businesses to participate in a wide range of work-based learning activities. The results highlight the importance of communications – using every vehicle that the Chamber has available (newsletters, radio show, events, etc) as well as social media. Regularly posting pictures from student events on Facebook and Twitter offers the employer partners with content that they can reuse and highlight their work in the community with employees and customers. One excellent pitch for all P-TECH schools to try – Workplace Challenges are our way to give back to employers with new ideas and solutions. Remind partners they will have an immediate return on their investment.

**Go deep with core employers and augment with non-traditional partners.**

Southern Tier P-TECH offers career pathways in advanced manufacturing, IT, and health careers. This program has 2 school leaders whose responsibilities include work-based learning and employer engagement. They don’t have a large cadre of employers, but their core partners are dedicated and respond to every request. Southern Tier P-TECH has also been successful identifying somewhat non-traditional partners, developing workplace challenges with schools, colleges, and non-profit organizations as clients and authentic problems and a professional development for the students to address. And remember, it’s your job to make it easy for employers to get involved. Don’t ask them to become teachers; just ask them to identify a real problem for students to solve and then the faculty will identify the requisite skills and the best pedagogy.

### **Tips from the Field**

Remember, every employer needs a well-prepared, highly skilled workforce. You are offering them something they need. And most people sincerely want an opportunity to give back to their community – make it easy for them to do it. Here are some tips from our conversations with the field.

### **Criteria for selecting an Intermediary/Partner**

- Is the organization well known and respected among local employers?
- Do they have existing relationships with a large number of your prospective partners, perhaps as members or clients?
- Does the organization have experience with collaboration, sharing responsibility and credit?
- Does the organization have other programming and resources to leverage for NYS P-TECH, e.g. events, newsletters, social media channels, etc?

### **Key messaging to engage new employers**

- P-TECH is the most direct pathway to fill your local talent pipeline
- There are multiple opportunities to participate – if this doesn't work for your company, we will find the right activity or event
- Let us find the right introductory activity for you or a couple of your employees. The first step is for you to meet our students.
- We appreciate whatever time you can offer – every hour is valuable and will provide a high return for our students

### **Strategies for juggling multiple business partners**

- Remember, this is sales – you are selling your school and the opportunity to work with the students to each employer
- Follow-up and always take the time to say thank you
- Never say goodbye – keep everyone on your distribution list and keep searching for the right fit
- Offer as many alternative activities and events as possible
- Be flexible with timing – it's helpful to have some standard programming for everyone's calendar (e.g. a monthly mentoring day or employer council meeting) but it's also important to provide options
- Attend to detail
- Leverage social media – this is not only visibility for P-TECH, but offers images that partners can re-use, re-tweet, re-post, etc
- Leverage your faculty – they have their own networks. Faculty can also help to deepen the engagement of individual partners as they create workplace challenges and projects
- Don't forget – the students are our best recruiters!
- Even as you expand your team of faculty and students engaging with employers, make sure there is one primary contact for quality assurance