

Promoting Partnership Opportunities

If they can't find you, they can't help you – have you made it possible for them to find you?

In the previous guide (Guide 3: How to Engage & Recruit Partners), we looked at the many ways in which you can leverage your personal and professional networks to find new partners. Which raises an obvious next question: Suppose, rather than you looking for new partners, they were looking for you? If someone in your chosen industry or profession started to search for local schools or colleges to work with in order to strengthen their workforce pipeline, would they find you and your program?

If you're like most educators, the majority of your industry relationships come through either personal networking or serendipity. It's time to cast your net wider, making sure that if someone wants to work with your students, you'll be the first person they find.

JOB NUMBER ONE: BE PREPARED

Before you jump into outreach, ask yourself a question: If someone finds me through these efforts, what will happen?

- If they call the school, will the front desk know what to say? Will they know that partnership calls are a priority, and be able to reach me or one of my peers quickly?
- If they reach me, do I know what to say about my students and my program? Have I practiced a short "elevator speech" (an introductory statement of 30 seconds or less) to quickly and clearly tell them who we are?
- Do I have success stories ready to share, particularly about former students who are now working in the field?
- If they ask about the ways in which we work with business partners, do I have concrete suggestions at the ready (understanding that these can be tailored based on my new partner's needs and resources)?

It's exciting to get a call from a prospective partner as a result of your outreach efforts; but if you're not ready for that call, it will probably be a wasted effort. As they say in basketball, "Know what you're going to do if you get the ball."

IT'S AN ONLINE WORLD...

In today's world, if you want to be visible you have got to be seen online: That's where people increasingly go first when they're looking for information and resources. The good news is that you can build a formidable online presence without spending a dime (though it will take some time).

One suggestion first: Before you invest time and effort into building an online presence, seek out your institution's communications point person. They can provide you with logos and branding guidelines, help you craft your messaging, create collateral materials, and work with you to get the word out about your program. They can also make sure your efforts line up with the overall communication strategy to avoid any expensive re-dos in the future.

Website

If someone goes to your school or college website, how easy is it for them to find your program? How many clicks does it take to locate how to engage? If they find you, what will they learn about you? Is there current information? Do you talk about your outcomes? Is the design and layout of your pages professional? Do they have a way (or multiple ways) to contact someone by name, rather than a generic email address?

Facebook

Despite some recent public relations issues, Facebook remains a hub for all kinds of social groups and activities. Build a page with information on your program (and, in particular, upcoming events and volunteer opportunities), and assign someone with the responsibility to update it on a regular basis with photos and messages. Encourage everyone – including current and former students, instructors, parents, and business partners to sign up, and be ready to respond to posts that people place on your page.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn can be used for outreach, establishing your credibility, and staying in touch with people you've met but have not yet partnered. In terms of outreach, it is best used to identify specific individuals within a company you've already decided to approach, as opposed to doing large campaigns across your community. As for credibility, it would be smart for you and your fellow instructors to create LinkedIn profiles, and to have one for your program or school as well. If people search for your city and profession, you'll come up in searches, and prospective partners will be able to learn about your activities, backgrounds, and interests. Finally, LinkedIn also provides a way to link with professionals in your area, particularly as a followup to an in-person meeting, and serves as a great tool for staying connected with alumni (especially if they're now working in your field). You can in fact post updates on activities, share articles, and more, both through general updates (each user periodically gets an email with updates on people in their network) and by forming and participating in user groups.

Twitter

Twitter's user base continues to grow dramatically, with people sharing news, updates, and opinions to people in their network. Send out tweets whenever something is happening, and just as importantly, sign up to access the tweets of your partners and partner companies so you stay on top of the events

and changes in their lives. Like Facebook, it makes sense to assign someone with the responsibility of regularly updating your accounts and communicating with subscribers; an inactive page or twitter feed won't serve your program very well.

Producing your own e-newsletter or blog

In addition to building an online presence, think about doing some active outreach by creating your own periodic e-newsletter or blog. You can use a professional service like Constant Contact to do a newsletter or you can simply write up a long email or create a PDF to send out; look at resources like Wordpress.org or Blogger.com for free or inexpensive blog support. Your partners and other stakeholders will appreciate being able to stay informed of program developments, success stories and the like.

Note that these options are just a reflection of some of the tools currently available and in vogue. Keep an eye out for new tools as they roll out and consider whether they should be added as part of your mix; the examples above, as well as others like SnapChat and Instagram, took off very quickly after launch, so it pays to stay on top of the field. And look for tools like Hootsuite that can help you manage multiple media accounts in order to streamline the communication process.

CREATING COLLATERAL MATERIALS

While creating an online presence is typically free, creating collateral materials is not: Producing professional materials to represent your program (particularly your partnership opportunities) will require you to spend some money, but the results will be worth it: A professionally designed and printed flyer makes a much better impression than a word processor flyer printed on your color printer. And of course, not everything has to be professionally printed: If you simply create your own letterhead you can run all sorts of other materials on that letterhead through your printer.

As noted in the social media section, seek out your institution's communications point person as you get started. They may be able to create materials for you or provide you with branding guidelines. And, if branding guidelines don't exist, they at least can offer an experienced eye as you develop resources and provide guidance on establishing your own consistent and professional presentation.

Consider producing the following kinds of materials:

- **Business cards** – These are a must-have for any meetings at which you might make professional contacts. Make sure they include your website and links to all your social media outlets so partners can learn about and connect with you.
- **Brochures, flyers, and presentation materials** – You should have a handful of information sheets, brochures, or flyers, as well as a PowerPoint presentation deck, that provide essential information on your work, such as a program overview, specific upcoming events like career fairs, or partnership opportunities like hosting an intern.
- **Case studies** – It's important to document your successes, whether those are specific partnership activities, program accomplishments, or student success stories. You can run these on letterhead (the less expensive option) or have them created as flyers (if you have good graphics or photos).
- **Annual reports** – Summertime is a great time to write an annual report or year-end review, which you can send to current partners, prospective partners, and administrators.

- **Testimonials** – Testimonials are powerful, yet partnership practitioners rarely gather and share them. Ask your partners for a testimonial and print a page or two of these endorsements; your program will gain quite a bit of credibility in the eyes of your new partners.

SPREADING THE WORD

With a solid web presence and an arsenal of collateral materials, it's time to start thinking about ways to get your story out, both within your industry and to the public at large. This means coming up with a press outreach strategy. It doesn't have to be complicated: Just think about the things you're doing that are interesting or newsworthy, come up with a list of your local reporters (including newspaper, radio, television, and online media), and share your information with them. Even getting one or two stories a year will help with your outreach and give you press clippings you can share with future partners.

Stories can be about upcoming activities, like career fairs or state competitions; success stories, such as a formerly-struggling student getting hired at a premier firm; or even about how a close, collaborative relationship you have with a business partner resulted in a solution to their hiring problems.

If you want help, you can always ask your business partners to lead a press outreach effort using their connections and their PR talent; you could also search for someone with media experience and give them a seat on your advisory board, asking them to share their expertise on an ongoing basis. And look again inside your own institution: Your communications team might be able to help with the development of press materials or outreach to the school's or college's press contacts.

PREPPING YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

In addition to all of the ways in which you can personally lead outreach efforts, don't overlook one more channel: The other professionals who have a vested interest in your program and can serve as advocates on your behalf. Talk with your advisory board members, your current business partners, and your school or college leaders about what you're trying to do, and ask what they can do to spread the word through their associations and professional networks. Make sure they have accurate information (the collateral material and press releases will be helpful here) and that they're ready to send leads your way once they've identified some interest. All of these people have an interest in seeing you succeed, so they'll welcome an opportunity to help.

ACTION STEP: MARKETING CHECKLIST

If you want partners to find you, review the list below and check off the things you are doing – or can do – in order to spread the word and make it easy to find you. Review it periodically, perhaps every year or so, to continue expanding your array of outreach tools. The more the better!

Action Item	Doing	Start within 30 days
I have a strong presence on our school or college website, with current information on my program, details on partnership opportunities, and my contact information.		
I have a Facebook page, regularly post information, and respond to comments.		
I tweet on Twitter and follow my current and prospective partners and their companies.		

I have a LinkedIn profile, both for the organization and key people; I keep them updated, and try to connect with people in my field.		
I send out occasional newsletters or updates and/or regularly blog.		
I collect email addresses of current and prospective stakeholders and actively manage that list to keep it current.		
I have professionally printed materials, including business cards and letterhead paper (which can be used for many different kinds of materials) as well as a PowerPoint presentation deck.		
I have an information sheet or brochure presenting my program, and use flyers regularly to promote upcoming events and partnership opportunities.		
I capture information on our successes, including student success stories and partner testimonials, and share those widely.		
I look for story ideas and share those with local media.		
I've talked with my partners and encouraged them to solicit articles through their media contacts.		
I've talked with key influencers, including school or college leadership, my current partners, and my advisory board members, and asked them to share our story.		

ADDENDUM: COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORTS

Looking for messaging supports and connections? Here is a start:

- Colorado CTE: <http://coloradostateplan.com/>
- Advance CTE: <https://careertech.org/>
- CO CTE Social media channels:
 - Facebook: Colorado Career Technical Education – CTE
 - Twitter: @sarahheathcte
- CO CTE hashtags: #cteworks; #cocte; #coctso
- CO CTSOs: Search for specific CTSO on social media

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide has been developed by Colorado CTE, housed at the Colorado Community College System to help Colorado CTE educators build strong and lasting relationships with employers and other stakeholders. For more information on CTE and other resources available to help you, please visit <http://coloradostateplan.com/>.

