Building & Growing
Community Partnerships

A guide to cultivating, building and managing community partnerships

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**We're reimagining learning so that our
students can change the world.**

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About this Module

Get ready for a phenomenal experience!
CAPS community partnerships take learning to a whole new level by expanding the boundaries of learning beyond traditional and physical classrooms. Deepening connections with your local community means employment pipelines for students, stronger connections between students and their community and the opportunity for them to envision a future beyond their immediate circumstances. CAPS is a program that ignites and celebrates innovation, creativity and problem solving. It's filled with

awesome mentors, speakers, students and instructors who make learning engaging, fun and interactive! Think creative problem solving on steroids.

Building partnerships does take some work though! Grab some caffeine, sit back and dig into this Module. This Module draws on the experience of CAPS Network affiliates (CAPS affiliates) and community partners to step you and your team through planning, organizing and securing community partners.

Inside this Module

This Module might appear overwhelming at first glance. It's understandable. When you look a little deeper, you will discover this resource answers questions, offers guidance and takes the mystery out of building community partnerships. Essentially, this tool serves as a coach. It provides insights, best practices and resources and tools to help leverage community partnerships.

As you read through the Module, you will see sections of content and icons that draw your attention to very specific information that you might be craving. Look for the icons or headers below when you want to get started quickly, gain peer insights, when you need some helpful tips and when you need a template or checklist for a task at hand.

Insight   CAPS affiliates and community partners share their experience and best practices with a specific component to building community partnerships.

Helpful Tip   Helpful Tips offer advice and experiences based on best practices learned from practitioners around the country.

Action Checklist: The Action Checklist serves as a quick-start guide. A checklist follows each of the three steps to building community partnerships. They're designed so you can dive right in and come back to the content later, if needed.

Resources & Tools: The Resources and Tools section at the end of this module contains contact information of CAPS champions, websites, videos, blogs, CAPS affiliates' tools and more to make your job a little easier. Why reinvent the wheel, right?

Remember, this is a guide. A huge value of being a CAPS affiliate is the collective knowledge of ALL involved. So be sure to check out the Insights throughout, as well as the Resources & Tools section. Reach out to other CAPS affiliates. Email us with questions or comments:

Jennifer Collet, Business Development Specialist – jcollet@bluevalleyk12.org

CAPS Core Values

Developing relationships with business, industry and higher education partners is critical to the success of CAPS. The CAPS model is designed to create a rich and meaningful experience for students, as well as partners. CAPS can be successful in any community by committing to the following:

- **Profession-Based Learning:** Instructors develop real-world, project-based learning strategies through collaborations with business and community partners. These interactions enhance the learning experience, preparing students for college and career.

- **Self-Discovery and Exploration:** Students realize their strengths and passions by exploring and experiencing potential professions. This allows them to make informed decisions about their future while learning to exhibit leadership.

- **Entrepreneurial Mindset:** Instructors create an environment where creative thinking and problem solving is encouraged. An innovative culture is key to fostering entrepreneurial learning and design thinking.

- **Professional Skills Development:** Unique experiences allow students to cultivate transformative professional skills such as understanding expectations, time management and other essential business values. These skills are critical to providing students a competitive advantage in their post-secondary education and professional careers.

- **Responsiveness:** CAPS supports high-skill, high-demand careers through ongoing innovation in curriculum development, programs and services based on local business and community needs.
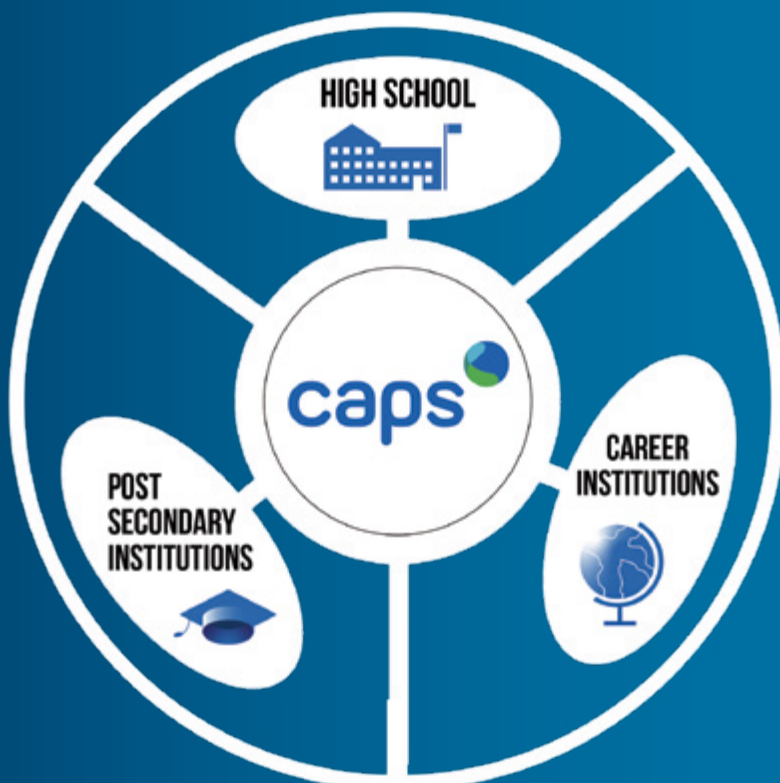
CAPS Innovation Model

The CAPS Innovation Model replaces the 100-year old traditional model of throwing students over the wall between high school, college and career. Our model provides a learning experience that integrates the three institutions—high school, college and career—into a single seamless community.

Reimagining Education

Expanding the Boundaries of Learning Beyond the Traditional Model

Visualize learning through CAPS programs and you see a model that has reimagined and restructured high school education by allowing students to focus on finding their passions, strengths and potential careers through real-world educational experiences. By leveraging strong community partnerships and combining that with the collective knowledge of CAPS affiliates, students engage in powerful, integrated, real-world learning that prepares them for life after high school. Reimagining and delivering education in this way produces individuals that not only optimize the combination of interests and career, but lifelong learners that are able to adapt to the changing circumstances of life and the economy.

The strong cooperation and commitment of CAPS affiliates and **community partners** make it possible to create **student experiences** and learning designed to promise a **significantly higher chance of success**.

> Read on to explore insights, lessons learned and how-to advice from CAPS' affiliates and community partners on cultivating community partner relationships and for resources and tools you can use as you plan, identify and build your community partnerships.

Community Partners

Expanding Learning and Changing the Odds for Success

Every organization has a secret sauce that contributes to its success. For CAPS, it is the collective knowledge and experience of instructors and community partners. CAPS affiliates establish and nurture relationships with community partners that are mutually beneficial, sustainable, coordinated and multi-faceted. Partners help shape curriculum, provide real-world projects, support professional development for instructors, invest in equipment and supplies and provide job shadow opportunities, speakers, mentors and internships. In order to achieve a high standard of education and student experiences, CAPS' pool of partners include individuals, businesses, educational institutions, government and civic organizations—each working together to bring expertise and other resources to support CAPS' programs.

Industry

The strong collaboration between CAPS affiliates and community partners benefits local communities and helps businesses be intimately involved in growing their future workforce and consumers. Often these businesses are seeking solutions to workforce development challenges and also appreciate building strong connections in the local community. Community partners are often welcoming of offers to work with students to place them in authentic environments and to connect them to their associates and professional network. These partnerships create employment pipelines that work both ways - students seeking future employment and employers seeking future employees.

Community partnerships take learning beyond the physical classroom. Students learn from educators who are not instructors. As examples, they solve real-world problems with engineering firms, design marketing campaigns with marketing firms and work alongside scientists in molecular medicine and bioengineering.

Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities recognize that CAPS graduates demonstrate the knowledge and competencies to succeed in post-secondary settings and to advance in career pathways as lifelong learners and contributing citizens.

Any company/organization that provides mentors, speakers, real-world projects, guest instructors, curriculum input and/or is an investor to the program is a community partner.

Real-world projects and internships provided by community partners develop students' skills in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and design thinking. Students are exposed to an array of job options beyond traditional thinking.

Here are a couple of examples of how community partnerships have impacted students and the larger community at Blue Valley CAPS:

DITEQ, a manufacturing company in Lenexa, KS, is providing real-world engineering projects to CAPS Blue Valley student teams. "Students are solving real-world engineering problems using out-of-the-box thinking. We like that!", says Engineering Manager, Mike Orzechowski. "The students are creating solutions that are unique. They're coming up with solutions engineers haven't thought of. It's a win-win for us."

WEINER FOUNDATION

In 2012, Samantha Hammontree and the Weiner Foundation provided seed capital to create the Blue Valley CAPS Innovation Celebration. This fundraising event is entirely student-driven and has evolved over time to reflect changes in the program. Since its inception, the Innovation Celebration has raised over $325K, involved hundreds of students and business partners and raised the profile of the program in the community.

Through community partnerships:

- Students have an opportunity to become **immersed in real industry environments.**

- Curriculum reflects the current and projected realities of industry trends and needs, **better preparing students for college and careers.**

- Local companies/organizations are able to **invest in talent early.**

- **Skills level gaps** can be identified and closed.

- **Curriculum can be revised and adjusted** according to changes in industry trends.

- Students are **connected to industry partners and potential job opportunities and networks** post-graduation.

Insight

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Without community partnerships, we would not be able to offer quality authentic experiences, coaching and training needed to close our regions' skills gap, attract and keep local talent and build self-awareness in our students.

Dr. Robert Hall, Executive Director, LAUNCH, Elmbrook Schools

Steps, Insights and Tools

For Building Community Partnerships

Creating a seamless community of students, higher education and community partners greatly enhances students' learning experience. Educators work alongside community partners to create learning environments that are engaging and fun. Following are steps, insights and tools designed to provide a guide for identifying, cultivating and managing community partnerships.

Student Internships

Equipment and $$$

caps

Real World Projects

Mentors

Externships

Advisory / Steering Committee

Community partners are often eager to engage with CAPS, especially after they have visited a CAPS affiliate and watched students and instructors in action—their enthusiasm, commitment, out-of-the box thinking and energy. Community partnerships take many forms and the motivation for engaging varies. The need for community partner support is ongoing and will evolve over time.

For students, the **energy of community partner champions**—innovators, industry experts and creative problem solvers—**naturally rubs off.**

① **Identify** Key Roles

Ⓐ Designate a Business Development Specialist or Community Partner Coordinator

A critical step in developing community partnerships is designating someone to build and manage the relationships. If funds are available, hiring a business development specialist or community partner coordinator is ideal. This person can onboard partners; explain the program to students, parents, and potential supporters; provide site tours; introduce prospective business partners to staff, instructors, and students; and manage the relationships. They can be the liaison and connector between staff and volunteers. Depending on the scope of the community partner plan, managing the process can be a full-time job.

Insight

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With early stage CAPS affiliates, an option is to free instructors from time that would have been formally designated as "supervisory" and allow them to do business development. At Blue Valley CAPS, all of our instructors do that. Instructors will probably need some business development coaching as business development is really a role shift for them.

Jennifer Collet, Business Development Specialist, Blue Valley CAPS

Helpful Tip

✓ Sometimes hiring a community partner coordinator is not financially feasible. If this is the case, consider organizing a committee of instructors and parents to lead your efforts. You need individuals who are motivated and committed. Strong community partnerships are possible as long as your efforts are driven, organized, collaborative, and you have strong leadership driving the team.

✓ In The Colorado Education Initiative's tool on *Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning*, the authors recommend looking for "someone who has great organizational, communication, and interpersonal skills, a desire to foster collaboration and creativity, and a willingness to serve as the relationship builder among students, instructors, parents, and community partners. The coordinator is there to connect expectations, needs, and common agreements among all of the organizations involved, including the CAPS affiliate. They will be fundamental to the success of the relationships and the work."

B Determine Key Community Partner Roles

Community partners add tremendous value to your program. The roles described below are the most common and have proven to be a key to success among CAPS affiliates. This list can serve as a guide in assisting you in determining which roles you will seek to fill as you launch and grow your program.

Advisory or Steering Committee Member

Designing, launching and growing a program is a long, complex process that requires intense committed partner participation. As advisory or steering committee members, community partners provide focused input and insights during each of the planning stages, including advice, support, guidance and a variety of resources. Community partners serving in this role leverage their networks, are representative of the different disciplines in student Strands, and/or are subject matter experts who can inform curriculum. In addition to industry partners, post-secondary institutions are also a key segment to serve on advisory or steering committees.

Externships for Instructors

Externships offer instructors an opportunity to enhance their skills and industry knowledge by working side-by-side with industry professionals. These experiences create opportunities for instructors to learn new "best practices" and to form professional relationships. What instructors learn help them to teach students current skills needed to be competitive.

Strand Selection and Development, Curriculum Support, Professional Development

To become an innovation asset that serves the economic development needs of the community, each CAPS program must be built to include Strands that reflect the skills and careers needed by industries, businesses and other institutions in their local community. A Strand is a term used to identify a cluster of related courses that are included in a general discipline. For example, Blue Valley CAPS' Strands include bioscience, business technology media, engineering, human services and medicine and healthcare. Much like a higher education degree,

within each of these Strands are a series of courses and/or topics that engage students in learning about their particular area of interest. One of the first community partner engagements must be to identify the major players in various industries and seek their participation in designing the CAPS Strands. Partnerships with those who own or lead businesses enables CAPS staff to create curriculum and teaching strategies that allow students to engage with the "real world" and prepare students for life after high school. Community partners provide critical insight into the kinds of employees and skills they most value and are instrumental in identifying the skillsets needed to prepare students for today's workforce. To develop curriculum, CAPS affiliates engage with community partners in one-on-one consulting meetings or through special committees dedicated to curriculum development. In addition, community partners often offer professional development opportunities for CAPS instructors and staff.

Helpful Tip

- The best committees are comprised of people who believe in your program, are aligned with your mission and vision, are committed to your success and can provide direct feedback and solve problems. They're thinkers and doers.

- For many CAPS affiliates, advisory committees are often working members of the team. They should be available, show up and be willing to contribute.

- Take time to think about the knowledge, expertise and input needed to launch and grow your program. Then, outline a list of the types of expertise, knowledge and input needed to inform your decisions.

Student Internships

Students gain real-world experiences through internships made possible by the participation of business partners. The internship experience for a CAPS student is an example of how business, community and public education can partner to produce personalized learning experiences that educate the workforce of tomorrow. This element of the CAPS program creates a win-win— it provides students with the opportunity to gain real-world, hands-on work experience in professional work environments that relate to their academic and career interests and prepares them for future jobs. It provides business partners (employers) an opportunity to guide and evaluate future talent. Internships provide the business partner with the opportunity to select, train and influence the best and brightest prospective talent, as well as to provide training and development opportunities for managers and mentors.

Real-World Projects

Relevance is central to the CAPS model. One of the growing themes of educational reform is the need to make experiences authentic—solving real problems mentored by real employers with real tools leading to real learning. To support that learning model, community partners provide projects selected and designed within the capabilities of the student and the Strand in which they participate. Projects can range from business services such as marketing, pricing strategy, event planning and management to creative services such as photography, graphic design or social media. Students work on projects such as solving engineering problems and software

Insight

" As a member of the corporate world, it's refreshing to see students think creatively to tackle projects in the way I've seen in the real world, and they haven't even made it there yet.

Amy Wilkinson, HNTB National Program Manager, C.H.A.S.E. Executive Director

design and development. Types of projects will vary between CAPS affiliates depending on the Strands offered in your individual program. The projects should support the Strand selections and be based on the needs of your community.

Classroom Speakers / Resources

Guest speakers are always in demand and there are always professionals eager to volunteer their time to speak about their career experiences. However, finding the right speakers and/or guest instructors is important. The better you know your students, the better you can evaluate a speaker for the classroom. Effective CAPS speakers are engaging and are able to connect with students.

Helpful Tip

- CAPS Internships can take many forms and formats. For some CAPS programs, only select individuals that have multiple semester experience are provided internships on a case-by-case basis. For other programs, internships are a fundamental element and provided for each and every student depending on their interest and the availability of opportunities in the community. The decision on which format is up to you. Much may depend on your business community and whether you can find internships for each and every student.

- Be sure to take structural considerations into account, i.e., commute times, transportation considerations, etc.

- When pairing students, take into consideration whether the student and community partner would be a good match. Pascack CAPS in New Jersey provides a unique internship experience for every student during their Spring semester. Using the Critical Factors of Success (CSF), capabilities of the student are matched with the culture of the community partner.

Insight

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The success of the program is that it's organic. There must be a genuine interest on the part of the mentor and the student.

Consider the needs of your students. Consider demographics, economics, etc. A mentor that comes from a similar background as a student and has "made it" can be powerful. Some students may need more support than others.

Consider pairing mentor and student by discipline (students and mentors are matched by students' interests and mentor expertise), students self-selecting (providing a mentor bio and allowing the student to select their mentor), by personality, or a combination. The criteria you use will depend on your culture, students and mentors.

Often, the role of mentor is perceived as a "baby sitter." Nothing could be further from the truth. Be sure to communicate to potential mentors that the program sees mentors as technical or knowledge experts who provide real-world guidance.

Jennifer Collet, Business Development Specialist, Blue Valley CAPS

Mentors

Connection skills are one of the key stages of skill development on the CAPS student journey. These skills provide the student the ability to build a network of individuals to guide them in their major life and career decisions. Formal mentorships are an important form of community partner engagement to build those skills. Mentors model behavior, answer questions and personally support student protégés. Connections with community experts give students the opportunity to receive relevant feedback, insight and inspiration within their area of interest. The mentoring relationship can take a variety of forms depending on the focus of the mentoring activities and practical considerations such as the distance between the school and the business partner. Mentoring may take place in-person, through online meetings, or in classrooms where mentors act as subject matter experts. Mentors can also participate in school projects. Mentoring could be a one-day event, just a few meetings, or a more in-depth longer-term relationship. Mentors are utilized throughout the students' entire CAPS experience.

Insight

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Our own mentors are our greatest champions when it comes to recruiting other business partners. Let them tell the Spark!/CAPS story to their business colleagues!

Dr. Jennifer Stanfill, Director of Choice Programs, Parkway School District, Library Services

Helpful Tip

✓ Select your mentors carefully. They should have the ability to communicate, lead and work with students.

✓ Don't assume they know how to work with students. Be sure to provide some guidance or training so they understand their roles and responsibilities. Share best practices for communicating and engaging with students.

Facilities / Hosting

At times, more classroom space or other workspaces may be needed in addition to your CAPS program physical location. Outside workspaces can also provide students a variety of opportunities and experiences that create meaningful connections between work and school and place students in environments where they have access to successful professionals outside the classroom. Full immersion into places of business is the most authentic environment and allows for experiential learning. For example, placing a class of future engineers in engineering firms or design students in architecture firms where students are working next to licensed professionals greatly increases the level of engagement and overall transformation. "Workplace learning" throughout the school year allows students to gain first-hand knowledge of an industry and the flow of actual workplaces. If space for a class or student group is needed, a conversation with a business partner about hosting CAPS students can be framed as an opportunity to add value to the business partner. It is not simply about seeking free or discounted rent. High school students can invigorate an environment and offer novel perspectives. In addition, CAPS programs can provide tremendous public relations value for organizations willing to host space.

Insight

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The CAPS model isn't an all chairs pointed in one direction, sit and get model of education. This is a chance for students to engage in open discussion and to ask free flowing questions based on their interests. It's important to us that our speakers understand this approach. We look for speakers who are able to connect with students. Will the students be able to relate to him or her? We consider their experience in their field and whether they come across authentic and positive, and whether they stay current and engaged in their field.

Gregg Brown, CAPS Network Coordinator

Helpful Tip

✓ Securing outside space from partners is a great way to quickly launch a CAPS program. You don't need to retrofit a classroom(s), or build a new building to get your program off the ground.

Equipment, Supplies & Monetary Support

Community partners provide various forms of funding and support—sponsoring events, donating workspace or classroom space, equipment, or software, as examples. Approaching a community partner about financial support for your program is best done by framing the ask in terms of a real tangible need. In other words, a partner is more likely to purchase a much-needed piece of equipment or software than to write a check for an unrestricted gift.

Helpful Tip

✓ Be strategic in your approach to maximize your success. If you don't wish to solicit funds for general program usage, consider a sponsorship model around a student celebration or other program event. Sponsorships are common gifting mechanisms for corporations.

Action Checklist #1

Identify Community Partner Roles & Prepare for Cultivating Relationships

☐ **Designate a Business Development Specialist or Community Partner Coordinator**
NOTE: If it is not financially feasible to hire, select a committee of instructors and parents to take responsibility for cultivating and managing the partner relationships. Be sure to select someone who will lead the efforts.

☐ **Research and understand the needs of the community**
- What are the local and industry trends?
- What are the partner's motivations for involvement?
- What are the partner's key needs - Students to provide services? A pipeline to students for employment?

☐ **Set up a database to track outreach: both potential and existing partners**

☐ **Form an advisory and/or steering committee**
- List the knowledge, expertise and input needed to launch and grow your program.
- Create a list of the types of expertise, knowledge and input needed to inform your decisions.
- Send invitations to prospective partners to serve as committee members.

☐ **Organize a planning session with the committee and key stakeholders**
- Review field research findings.
- Explore goals and strategy:
  - How will community partners help us meet our goals?
  - What roles are we seeking to fill? (Refer to the previous role descriptions.)
  - What are the skillsets and/or characteristics we're looking for in each role?
  - How will we measure success?
  - When do we need to have our partners in place and ready to go?

☐ **Identify the key categories/areas for engagement. These will be based on program needs and local market conditions**

CAPS affiliates are eager to share experiences and can provide great insight into how they build and manage their community partnerships. So, reach out! A list of CAPS champions is provided at the end of this Module under Resources & Tools.

2 **Cultivate** & Recruit Partners

Cultivating and recruiting community partners is a process that requires planning and coordination. CAPS programs call for creative efforts to manage the time and effort it takes to build and grow partnership support. Effective partnerships define a clear vision and goals. The partnerships are effectively managed, operate efficiently and are responsive to community needs. They draw from a broad range of perspectives and expertise both internally and externally. Effective partnerships require connection, coordination, continuous communication and leverage resources from a variety of sources to support and continue their work (Blank; Langford 2000).

Cultivating the right relationships is important to positive student experiences. With the right relationships, a students' education and experiences can be transformed. The key is making sure the partner is a good fit with your program's culture, students and processes. Although establishing community partners is a key activity of start-up and early stage CAPS affiliates, recruitment is critical at all stages. While it is optimal to have a set of partners that work with you each semester, normal attrition and the need to stay relevant to changing market trends requires this to be a continuous activity no matter how many years you have been in operation.

- **Focus on** a mutually beneficial relationship.
- **Avoid** a rigid threshold of involvement.
- **Make it easy** for partners to engage.
- **Establish a culture** of continuous and ongoing communication.

Ways to Cultivate Community Partnerships

Be Clear About Your Vision

Articulating your vision and being clear about the outcomes you want to achieve through your community partnerships is a critical first step. It will drive the messages you use to promote your program and recruit community partners. If you do not already have your vision statement and projected outcomes in place, you can use the following questions to craft your vision:

- Why are community partners important to our learning model?

- What experiences do our students, families, and community want to see cultivated?

- How will our community partners help us meet our goals?

- Once community partners are integrated, what will the learning experience look like?

Answering these questions and being clear will ensure potential community partners understand your education model and how they fit in.

Know What to Look For in a Community Partner

Finding the right partners is key. The 5 C's of Successful School Community Partnerships listed below have been adapted from the CEI Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning Toolkit. They provide helpful guidelines to better ensuring the right partners are in place and that the relationship is mutually beneficial.

- **Common Purpose:** The partnership supports a shared set of goals established by both participants and aligned with both partners' mission and vision.

- **Complementary Content:** The school seeks out community partners with expertise that complements instructors and staff, establishing partnerships that bring outcome driven programs, resources and services to the school that correspond with its goals.

- **Communication:** Clear, consistent communication occurs on two levels: between the leader of the school and the leader of the community partner, and between the instructors and staff who work directly with students.

- **Customized Partnership:** Both partners are flexible in adapting existing programming to create a customized partnership that fits the unique context of a curriculum that immerses students in a professional culture, solving real world problems.

- **Continuous Improvement and Sustainability:** Both partners are committed to continuous improvement. Each share in the responsibilities for relationship building.

Recruiting Potential Partners

Successful recruitment requires planning, strategy and diligence. It is also about patience, personality and attitude behind the effort. Recruiting CAPS partners often requires face-to-face meetings, particularly in cases where CAPS is not as well known in the community. It is about making personal connections, even with a good marketing campaign. Following are recommendations on where to find potential partners and various ways to engage.

> ### Insight
>
> " Always ask potential business partners how your students can help them. Be sure they know you are seeking a mutually beneficial partnership.
>
> **Dr. Jennifer Stanfill, Director of Choice Programs, Parkway School District, Library Services**

Where to Find Community Partners

- **Personal networks and contact lists:** Peers, friends and family all have circles of influence and personal networks. Students can also be a good resource for developing a list of partners. Their parents or guardians, or their friends' parents or guardians, may be working for companies that will engage because their children are enrolled in the local school system.

- **Local entrepreneurial community:** Entrepreneurs, by their nature, want to help and to give back. They also need help. They are often strapped for resources and need various projects handled by someone outside the company. Many communities have entrepreneurial organizations or organizations focused on fostering entrepreneurship and co-working spaces specifically for entrepreneurs. Reaching out to your local Chamber of Commerce is a good first step. Ask the Chamber, "Where can I find entrepreneurs? Where can I find businesses in technology, commercialization, start-up companies and small businesses?" Be specific.

- **Community meetings:** Attending community meetings shows a level of engagement and commitment with the community, and provides an opportunity to recruit students, instructors, community leaders, or advisory members. It is also an unparalleled opportunity to get direct feedback from the community about how they would like to engage with the program. It can be fertile ground for discovering potential partnerships.

- **Non-profit organizations:** Small, community businesses or non-profits can be just as impactful as larger businesses or corporations. It is often smaller companies or non-profit organizations that bring projects to students. These projects can be mutually beneficial. For example, a farmer's market can work with students to develop a marketing plan. The students benefit from having real problems to help solve, and the local community organization benefits from having the resource of engaged students. Smaller or non-profit organizations often lack abundant resources or manpower to handle many of their tasks or to solve problems and CAPS students can help fill this gap.

Helpful Tip

- Don't be hesitant in asking people to share their lists of contacts. With your team, be sure to compare lists and decide who will contact each person so efforts are not duplicated. Then tap into these networks strategically as you begin recruiting partners. In addition to personal connections and networks, brainstorm with your team regarding other types of contact lists to seek and/or build.

Ways to Engage the Community

- **Get on agendas:** Community organizations such as Lions Club or Rotary, Chambers of Commerce, and others host monthly or quarterly meetings that provide opportunities to get on an agenda and present the CAPS program to prospective partners. In addition, these organizations are a great way to meet people who are very involved and are influential in your community.

- **Host a lunch and learn:** Lunch and Learn events held at your CAPS location are great opportunities to get people in the door so you can tell your story. It is a chance to conduct tours of the building and classrooms so potential partners can experience the program first hand.

- **Invite community partners to classrooms:** Seeing students engaged in real-world learning breeds excitement. It provides an opportunity to see first-hand how CAPS reimagined learning is changing the odds for students and their future.

- **Line up speaking engagements:** Speaking engagements outside CAPS and in your local community offer opportunities to get in front of the people that can most influence your program. In many instances these people include city planners, non-profit leaders, business leaders and entrepreneurs. Speaking engagements offer opportunities to get more buy-in, uncover additional speakers and mentors, plant the seed around sponsorship possibilities and, of course, receive referrals of potential student participants.

- **Host a roundtable event:** Roundtable events provide a chance to tell your story and to gain thoughts, ideas and insights from your guests. Events that are most productive encourage active participation.

- **Utilize social media:** Social media provides a way to spark conversation and get your audience excited about CAPS. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are great forums for students, faculty, sponsors and others to share their experience and motivation for partnering with CAPS. Accounts can be set up for the CAPS program as whole, as well as individual pages for the various Strands and classes.

Guiding Principles of Effective Recruiting

- Every interaction can lead to a potential partner. While recruitment is a planned process - presenting at Chambers, community events or during a Lunch & Learn - successful recruitment can also happen through casual conversation in a store or during a Sunday gathering at a friend's. It is 24/7 engagement through social media, marketing campaigns and personal conversation that leads to professional relationships that lead to partnerships.

- All CAPS instructors, students and stakeholders play a role. While efforts to recruit fall mainly to the business development specialist or committee, almost every person the CAPS program touches plays a role: board members, parents, instructors, current community partners and staff. These groups can be influential and share their stories and experiences.

- Determination and resilience pay off. Building relationships that lead to community partnerships takes a little time. Particularly in the early stages of a new program. Continue to reach out in strategic ways. Getting a foot in the door to talk to the right person requires persistence.

- Clear messaging is key. The Resources & Tools section of this module contains sample messaging and tools to ensure those involved in recruitment are 1) communicating the same message, and 2) have the tools they need to make recruitment easier. These are sample materials. The most effective materials are those that are created with your specific community in mind—their needs, motivators, etc.

Action Checklist #2

Cultivate & Recruit Community Partners

Cultivate

☐ **Refine the vision for enhancing the student learning experience. Outline goals & outcomes**

☐ **Outline criteria for ensuring the right partners are recruited and in place**

☐ **Share community partner criteria with those who will participate in recruitment: instructors, committee members, etc.**

☐ **Reach out to instructors, students and others to compile a list of potential partners**
  - Create a database of contacts that can be easily updated and shared.
  - Ask each member of the team to provide a list of potential contacts and enter those in the database.
  - Create a list of possible speaking opportunities. (Rotary, council meetings, etc.)

☐ **Create flyers, brochures or other material to aid in recruitment**

☐ **Begin social media campaign**
  - Designate a social media "manager."
  - Create a strategy for what to post and when.
  - Develop an implementation plan.
  - Develop a plan to monitor engagement and ensure posts receive a response (if needed).

Recruit

☐ **Make a warm introduction via email or phone to gauge interest**
  - If there is interest, set up a face-to-face meeting (preferably at CAPS to offer a tour) or at a site most convenient for the potential partner.

☐ **Plan opportunities for engagement**
  - Host a Lunch & Learn.
  - Host a roundtable.
  - Invite potential partners to visit classrooms.

☐ **Follow-up with a "thank you" and request for commitment to partner with CAPS**
  - Based on the level of interest, provide a "next step" so the potential partner knows to
  - expect follow-up.
  - Be sure to ask for referrals and/or introductions to other potential partners.

☐ **If there is genuine interest, working with the potential partner, identify where they best fit for engagement (mentor, curriculum development, projects, etc.)**

CAPS affiliates are eager to share experiences and can provide great insight into how they build and manage their community partnerships. So, reach out! A list of CAPS champions is provided at the end of this Module under Resources & Tools.

③ **Manage** Partner Relationships

Once community partners have been selected, CAPS affiliates must determine how the relationship will be managed. Key elements include being clear about roles and responsibilities, expectations, means and frequency of communication, scope of the work and metrics for measuring success.

Create a Community Partner Handbook

Providing a handbook gives community partners access to useful information about CAPS such as the school calendar, lists of staff members and who to contact should they want more information. This will save community partners time by eliminating the need to email or call every time they want this type of information. It also saves time on the part of CAPS.

Develop a Communication Plan and Follow Through

Regular communication to address any questions or concerns is key to maintaining and managing positive partner relationships. While the business development specialist will most likely lead most of this effort, students and instructors should participate as well. Students and instructors are working side-by-side with community partners in most roles they would serve.

Regular communication is a great way to assess any needs for change, to revisit goals and plan for future engagements. It is also a starting point for measuring impact through a more formal evaluation. It can also provide great insights into key marketing messages for cultivating new partners.

Send thank-you letters or emails. You want to keep the doors open for ongoing support. Consider hosting a couple of meetings per year. Ask your strongest supporters to be keynote speakers at these events. Supporters would benefit from receiving emails and marketing materials, keeping them updated and engaged. They are integral parts of the aggregate success of CAPS.

E-Newsletters
Because the CAPS model integrates high school into other important community institutions, there is a large number of stakeholders who want to keep up with what is going on in the program. E-Newsletters can be an efficient way to share news informing partners of what is going on in the program, successes, initiatives and upcoming events. They can be a great way to recruit new partnerships and students and build the overall CAPS brand. Promoting partners and sponsors draws attention to well-deserved recognition.

Create Marketing Opportunities

Consider listing partners and sponsors on marketing material and websites. If your building has TV sets mounted on walls, display partner logos and photos of partners working with students and instructors. Partners will appreciate the well-deserved recognition. Generate media coverage by sending news releases and notifying the media of special events.
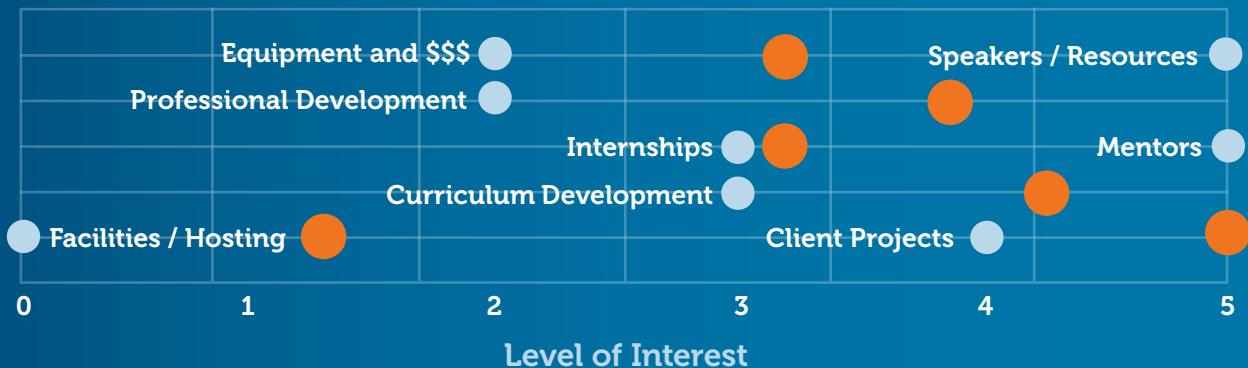
Helpful Tip

Westside CAPS' guidelines for newsletters:

- ✓ Utilize in-school resources to include students.

- ✓ Use pictures of students in action.

- ✓ Utilize market-standard software like InDesign (Adobe product) to build student skills.

- ✓ Develop content that stimulates interest in parents, students, school administration, high school staff, business partners, local colleges and assorted community members.

- ✓ Promote upcoming events.

- ✓ Leverage program specific culture.

- ✓ Provide the Director's perspective to enhance the overarching objectives of the program.

CAPS business development specialists, instructors and community partners shared their ideas, insights and best practices for building and nurturing community partnerships. Their guidance is below.

Opportunities for more engagement
XYZ Corporation | Engagement Analysis

Equipment and $$$
Professional Development
Speakers / Resources
Internships
Mentors
Curriculum Development
Facilities / Hosting
Client Projects

0   1   2   3   4   5

Level of Interest

Analyze Engagement

There is value in tracking the specific areas of engagement that are of interest to the community partner. It is also beneficial to track their current level of engagement. This becomes a quick reference to manage partnerships both now and in the future.

Example: In the graph above, a CAPS site has created a tool to measure engagement and level of interest using a scale ranging from 1 to 5: 1 representing either the least amount of interest or current level of engagement and 5 representing the highest. The blue dots represent the partner's current level of engagement while the orange dots represent the level of interest expressed by the partner the last time the role was discussed. The team then listed the all the roles in which a community partner could engage for their specific program. The list of roles will vary depending on your program. For example, some CAPS sites may engage partners in providing facilities, while others may not.

This graph can be created using Excel or other tool. The important thing is to keep track.

Create Mutual Benefit

Partnerships should be quid pro quo. CAPS programs present a unique opportunity to create a win-win in which both CAPS and business partners receive something of value from the relationship: a handshake rather than a handout. By offering rather than asking,

you're more likely to persuade businesses to engage and support your program.

Ask potential partners, "What are your needs? What skills and qualities are you looking for in your future workforce? What opportunities can we provide to students that would give them an advantage when entering the workforce?" Do your research and understand their motivations for participation. Consider meeting with multiple businesses and organizations throughout your community to learn what you can. What are their most pressing issues? Are they most concerned about workforce development? Do they see this as a public relations opportunity? Do they simply want to give back to the community?"

Do not assume the partner will know how to plug into the program. Follow up with, "I understand you need ___. Here are a couple of ways you could engage with CAPS."

Helpful Tip

- Create pathways to drop in and out of engagement to accommodate the business needs of your partners.

- Be aware of seasonal and other constraints.

Start Local and Start Small

While many CAPS affiliates have relationships with larger companies with offices throughout the country, new programs should start by focusing on their local community. Many associates of local businesses and organizations have students enrolled in the school system and are enthusiastic about the model of education CAPS offers.

If you're recruiting partners to provide projects for students, start with a smaller project. Give them time to get comfortable with the students and CAPS model. The relationship will evolve and grow as the partner becomes more familiar and more comfortable with the relationship. "We meet our partners where they are. Engaging with high school students is a new concept for many of our partners. Starting small lets them develop confidence in the partnership.

Be aware of both the comfort level of partners and the restrictions of various industries. Some Strands, such as health services, have regulatory restrictions that drive the degree of engagement.

Make Engagement Easy

While some partnerships develop into deep, formal partnerships, many CAPS partnerships are informal and start on a much smaller scale and later expand into larger roles. Partners can support student learning as guest speakers, mentor students on skills like crafting social media posts, or provide workplace tours. Starting small allows partners to get to know and understand the CAPS model and build a longer-term, deeper relationship.

While we believe communicating expectations in a formal way is important, too much formality would scare most of our community partners away, especially in the early stages. Too much formality and you lose flexibility. Make It easier to engage." Partnership agreements can range from formal—signing a formal agreement outlining duration of the relationship, etc. to informal—a conversation and handshake. The level of "agreement" depends on the needs and the comfort level of the partner. A key consideration in determining whether formal partnership agreements are necessary is knowing your partner. Most are more comfortable and welcome the lack of complexity and formality.

Be Clear About Expectations

Once the key elements of how you will work together have been addressed, consider producing

a Community Partnership Agreement or, at a minimum, communicate the expectations via a letter or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Note that mentors typically do not have a MOU. A key consideration in determining whether formal partnership agreements are necessary is knowing your partner.

Be Aware of Time Constraints

Calendars fill up quickly. The more advance notice and tools you can provide a partner, the easier it is for them to engage. If partners are providing projects, begin recruiting projects at least six weeks before the start of a semester. Partners also benefit from such tools as sample schedules/agendas for workplace tours, templates for mentoring and other resources so that the onus is not on the business to create a curriculum.

Create pathways to drop in and out of engagement to accommodate the business needs of your partners. Be aware of seasonal and other constraints. Many businesses and organizations face times during the year when business is at its peak—CPAs during tax season, year-end budget crunching, and others. Managing partner relationships includes asking partners for those times they are not available and not asking them to do something would create a hardship on their employees.

Insight

"As a new/prospective program, you're going to need to make investments in infrastructure that's not typically found in traditional high schools. For example, Blue Valley CAPS uses Basecamp for project management. This web-based service streamlines engagement for business partners and project partners and makes it possible for instructors to supervise or manage multiple projects.

Jennifer Collet, Business Development Specialist, Blue Valley CAPS

Action Checklist #3

Manage Partner Relationships

☐ **Create a "check-in with partner" calendar to monitor progress toward the goal (Check-ins open the door to increase both the depth and breadth of the partnership)**
- Create a calendar with check-in dates (preferably each semester).

☐ **Consistently monitor staff changes. The more touch points you have within an organization for the partner the stronger the relationship. Avoid being tied to only one CAPS program champion**

☐ **Recognize contributions. Options include annual partner recognition events, online recognition or during events**

☐ **Develop a discipline around business development**
- Make business development a priority. This is especially true if you do not have an internal resource dedicated to the effort.
- Focus your effort on relationships that have the best chance for success. Growing an existing relationship should take precedent over chasing a prospect.
- Automate some of your partner nurturing by sending communications that provide valuable insights about your program. Connect with prospects and current partners on LinkedIn and Twitter.

☐ **Monitor engagement and assign a value to both the current and desired level of engagement**

CAPS affiliates are eager to share experiences and can provide great insight into how they build and manage their community partnerships. So, reach out! A list of CAPS champions is provided at the end of this Module under Resources & Tools.

Resources & Tools

Note: Since CAPS programs are always evolving, growing, and fine
tuning, Resources & Tools files will likely evolve and change periodically.

Have Questions?
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Research & Resources

CAPS Network
Provides current information on program and updates.
yourcapsnetwork.org

Next Generation Learning
"Next Generation Learning Challenges supports the educators who are reimagining public education. NGLC helps them apply what we know about learning to school design; we help them live next gen learning professionally; and we work with them to generate environments in which next gen learning can flourish."
Click here to view website

XQ Institute
"We began with XQ: The Super School Project, a competition inviting America to reimagine high school. People across the country self-assembled into teams and started a movement to transform high school education in their areas." This module addresses how to expand the boundaries of learning beyond school.
Click here to explore the website

The Colorado Education Initiative
A step-by-step guide to developing community partnerships.
Click here to view PDF

America Achieves Education Network
"The Promise of Patnerships: Engaging Industry to Improve Career Readiness"
Click here to view website

Videos

Jennifer Collet on Business Partners with CAPS
Click here to view video

Jenna Felsen, CAPS Alumna: Gaining Real-World Experience
Click here to view video

Testimonials

Cedar Falls CAPS
Cedar Falls CAPS and Viking Pump: A business partner perspective
CAPS instructors, students and Viking Pump, a community partner of Cedar Falls CAPS, share how CAPS and Viking Pump came together to build a valuable partnership and the impact it has had on all involved.
Click here to watch video

CAPS Network Best Practices Toolbox

Under Construction....