

Northern Wyoming Career Pathways Partnership Work-Based Learning: A Quick Start Guide for Employers

Work-Based Learning: Is it your Missing Link in Talent Development?

As an employer, you likely invest significant time and other resources in developing the talent your organization needs for success. This guide is designed to help you explore how work-based learning (WBL) can be a valuable component of your talent development efforts, whether you already have some experience as a WBL partner to one or more educational institutions or are just beginning to think about whether WBL is right for your organization.

Work-based learning (WBL) is a continuum of age- and skill-appropriate experiences designed through education and industry partnerships. As described by Jobs for the Future, a leading, national resource on education and workforce development, when done well, WBL “leads not only to better employment outcomes, such as higher wages, but also addresses employers’ critical need for a steady supply of highly skilled talent. The result is greater economic mobility, a stronger workforce, and a more competitive economy.”

Throughout this Quick Start Guide, both the business needs of the employer and the developmental needs of students will be addressed. It includes:

- An overview of the Work-Based Learning Continuum of activities and opportunities made available to youth;
- Information on how education leaders, employers, and other community stakeholders are working together to expand WBL opportunities and participation;
- Highlights on how WBL is being incorporated into the priorities of public education institutions across Sheridan and Johnson Counties, including who to contact to explore or expand your organization's role as a WBL employer partner;
- A snapshot of the 3 simple steps employer partners should take – from establishing a vision for their use of WBL in talent development, to preparing for and supporting youth in a WBL experience designed to benefit both the organization and student, and using information gleaned from each WBL experience to improve (and maybe expand) future WBL offerings; and
- A short list of considerations any employer may want to think through along the way.

This tool is designed to help you start, sustain, and/or grow a program that meets your business needs while also helping the young professional to thrive. By investing in the young people of Sheridan County and Johnson County, employers can build their stable workforce tomorrow, expand the exposure among potential future employees, and even develop existing employees through postsecondary programs and partnerships.

Work-Based Learning for Small Businesses and Those Just Considering Engaging Students in the Workplace

WBL can be a strategy used by almost any business and organization - of any size (including small businesses, even sole proprietorships), and type, such as public service, community organizations, and other not-for-profits.

Because any WBL experience is designed as a learning opportunity for students, a critical aspect of any WBL experience is the employer's provision of appropriate supervision, feedback, and, if possible, mentoring to help students learn what is needed to succeed in the workplace.

Nothing in this Guide is intended to suggest that a small business or other employer will need to hire a WBL supervisor or incur any particular costs. The information provided and resources highlighted within are, above all, meant to offer ideas and tips based on the WBL experiences of others. Each education system point of contact - local school district or collect - is available to provide information on any requirements that may not be detailed in this guide.

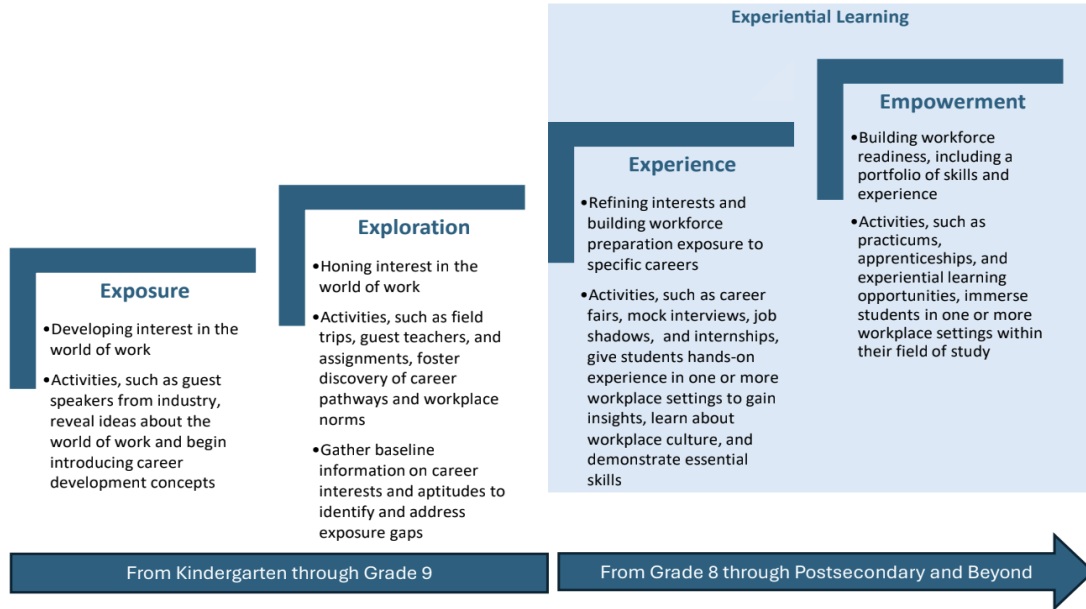
The WBL Continuum: It isn't just for high school and college students.

In the early grades, students participate in learning activities designed to build career awareness and interest. As they reach the Experiential Learning stage of the continuum, students have the opportunity to connect what they learn in school with worksite application, supporting success in the workforce and lifelong learning opportunities. This continuum of activities and experiences, illustrated below, progresses from sparking interest in youth about the “world of work” they see adults in their lives participating in to hands-on experience in the workplace, including the acquisition of technical and other skills and building social capital through mentoring.

Because the Experiential Learning components of the continuum involve employers in deep partnerships with the education system staff, this Quick Start Guide is focused on that end of the continuum. It includes activities such as job shadows, internships, apprenticeships, and experiential learning. These kinds of activities and others are defined below. (Download the WBL Continuum [here](#))

Work-Based Learning

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From Kindergarten through Grade 9

- Big Horn Elementary School (SCSD #1)
- Big Horn Middle School (SCSD #1)
- Tongue River Elementary School (SCSD #1)
- Tongue River Middle School (SCSD #1)
- Henry A. Coffeen Elementary School (SCSD #2)
- Highland Park Elementary School (SCSD #2)
- Meadowlark Elementary School (SCSD #2)
- Sagebrush Elementary School (SCSD #2)
- Story Elementary School (SCSD #2)
- Woodland Park Elementary School (SCSD #2)
- Wright Place Middle School (SCSD #2)
- Sheridan Junior High School (SCSD #2)
- Clearmont Elementary School (SCSD #3)
- Arvada-Clearmont Junior-Senior High School (SCSD #3)
- Cloud Peak Elementary School (JCSD #1)
- Meadowlark Elementary School (JCSD #1)
- Clear Creek Middle School (JCSD #1)
- Kaycee K-12 School (JCSD #1)

From Grade 8 through Postsecondary and Beyond

- Big Horn Middle School (SCSD #1)
- Big Horn High School (SCSD #1)
- Tongue River Middle School (SCSD #1)
- Tongue River High School (Dayton – SCSD #1)
- Wright Place Middle School (SCSD #2)
- Sheridan Junior High School (SCSD #2)
- Sheridan High School (SCSD #2)
- John C. Schiffer Collaborative (SCSD #2)
- Arvada-Clearmont Junior-Senior High School (SCSD #3)
- Clear Creek Middle School (JCSD #1)
- Buffalo High School (JCSD #1)
- Kaycee K-12 School (JCSD #1)
- New West High School (JCSD #1)
- Sheridan College

Through this Quick Start Guide, additional resources linked within it, and training sessions that will be made available to employers, your organization can reflect on and start planning for the strategic use of WBL in meeting your talent development targets and workforce goals. This could include any combination of opportunities that engage students within their classroom/school, in organized events such as career fairs and field trips, and experiences in your workplace.

Growing Supply to Meet Demand

Wherever you focus within the WBL Continuum, your WBL program – big, small, in-development, or well established – will help young people envision themselves as professionals, to find work opportunities without having to relocate, to understand what is needed to succeed in the workplace, to build essential workplace skills, to make informed educational choices, and to find lasting purpose in both their community and their career. It is important to remember that this is a collaborative effort - so even if you only focus on one area in the Continuum, your work is appreciated and valuable to the larger effort within our two counties.

While your decisions regarding when and how to incorporate WBL into your talent development strategies will be based on considerations unique to your organization, you might find it interesting to know that a recent survey of career preparation among teenagers around the globe revealed that “The U.S. significantly lags behind other countries...in providing students with career development activities, such as internships and job shadowing.” (The State of Global Teenage Career Preparation (OECD, May 2025)) Locally, public education system leaders in Sheridan and Johnson Counties, have embarked on an initiative aimed at not only expanding WBL opportunities, but also getting smarter about how WBL can be designed more effectively to:

- Expose students earlier on to available career options and the paths to pursuing those options and understand the various paths to achieve them (closing the “exposure gap”); and
- Engage them in work-based activities that connect learning to the workplaces of today (closing the “experience gap”).

By joining in this effort, you will be a valuable partner working toward high, yet achievable goals. Together, we can increase access to and participation in high-quality work-based learning by the youth, education systems, and employers of Sheridan and Johnson Counties.

Multiple Entry Points Connected by a Common Approach

The four (4) public school districts serving Sheridan and Johnson Counties and Sheridan College (which has campuses in both counties) are working together to ensure their students are provided with high-quality work-based learning opportunities throughout their educational careers. Just as each employer’s WBL offerings will be tailored to the organization’s needs, capacity, and interests, each education institution designs and implements its programs in ways that reflect strong commonality and some variation.

Your Primary Point of Contact

For activities within the Career Exposure and Career Exploration stages of the WBL Continuum, employers can partner with any of the eighteen (18) schools which enroll students in their journey from kindergarten to grade 9. Career Exposure and Career Exploration activities are generally coordinated between a teacher in an elementary school, middle school, junior high school, or junior-senior high school.

Career Experience and Career Empowerment activities are generally coordinated at the school district or college program level. Thirteen (13) schools serving middle and high school students, along with Sheridan College, work with employers to design and implement Career Exposure and Career Empowerment opportunities for youth in grade 8 and beyond. Please reach out to one or more of the WBL coordinators, listed below, early on in your consideration of becoming a WBL partner to a school. They can help you think through the benefits your organization can expect, the kinds of opportunities found to be most beneficial to students, and the processes and resources your organization will need to commit. They will also guide you through completion of any required forms and support your efforts.

Highlights of the Career Experience and Career Empowerment activities currently being implemented, along with the WBL coordinator for each, are included below:

	Highlights of WBL Opportunities	WBL Coordinator	Email	Phone
Sheridan County School District #1	SCSD1 - Highlights of WBL Opportunities	Stephanie Aitchison, Job Coach	saitchison@sheridan.k12.wy.us	(307) 655-9541 ext. 1207
Sheridan County School District #2	SCSD2 - Highlights of WBL Opportunities	Heidi Richins, Coordinator WBL	heidirichins@scsd2.com	(307) 672-2495 ext. 1903
Sheridan County School District #3	SCSD3 - Highlights of WBL Opportunities	Loyce Ellingrod, K-12 School Counselor/Job Coach	lellingrod@shr3panthers.com	(307) 758-4411 Ext 120
Johnson County School District #1	JCSD1 - Highlights of WBL Opportunities	Jake Evans, Principal at Buffalo High School	jevans@jcsd1.us	(307) 684-2269
Sheridan College	Sheridan College - Highlights of WBL Opportunities	Kristine Mantey, Director of Business Programs	kmantey@sheridan.edu	(307) 675-0786

Designing your WBL Program: 3 Steps to Success

“Connecting academic learning with hands-on learning in a workplace setting is one of the oldest and most proven methods of education in the world.”

Source: Strada Education Foundation

Work-based learning that engages a student and employer at a work site – specifically job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, including the experiential learning that is required of students in the Sheridan College Bachelor of Applied Science in Leadership and Management (BAS) program – necessitates more extensive planning, coordination, implementation, and communication between employers and schools than is required for school-based activities at lower levels of the Continuum.

There are three simple, yet important, steps employers should take, working in concert with school staff (high school and/or college) and the WBL employer partnership coordinator.

1. PLAN

- **Explore your vision for engaging in WBL**, including your workforce/talent development goals, near- and longer-term workforce needs, the essential skills employees in your organization need for success, and the capacity within your organization to support high-quality WBL opportunities.
- **Engage with one or more WBL coordinators** to discuss your goals, surface questions, and talk through considerations for the design and implementation of high-quality WBL opportunities.
- **Design your WBL opportunities** (or even an WBL program tailored to your organization’s needs) in partnership with the appropriate WBL coordinator(s). (See Things to Consider as you Begin to Plan, Appendix A)

2. IMPLEMENT

- **Interview candidates**, as appropriate, working with a WBL coordinator to obtain the best “match” based on student eligibility, aptitudes, interest, skills, and more.
- **Kick-off your program** with a warm welcome and strong orientation. (See Launch & Orient, Appendix A)
- **Engage and support your new team members** with mentoring, timely feedback, and coaching.
- **Celebrate & Conclude** the closure of a successful WBL opportunity. (See Celebrate & Conclude, Appendix A)

3. REFLECT & REFINE

- **Consider** internal design strengths. Identify any challenges to be addressed, as well as opportunities for expansion.
- **Share feedback** with the appropriate WBL coordinator(s).

Things to Consider as You Begin to Plan

For information on some of the common features of high-quality internships and apprenticeships, as well as some issues your organization should consider in designing WBL opportunities, such as assignment of a dedicated mentor/supervisor and providing appropriate supervision and feedback, *please see* Appendix A.

Over time, additional resources will be added. Questions are always welcome and will help us expand on this guide to better meet your needs.

ATTRIBUTION & RESTRICTIONS ON USE

This Quick Start Guide was developed by Foresight Law + Policy PLLC using, in part, information borrowed, with modification, from [The Employer's Guide to Successful Internships](#). That resource, produced by the College, Career & Community Pathways Program, LANL Foundation, Tobie Baker Wright, Author – May 2023, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – Noncommercial International License. To view a copy of the license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. References are also provided to material included in the LANL Guide and described as “Adapted from the National Governors Association white paper, “States Continue Advancing Strategies to Scale Work-Based Learning” available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED583170.pdf>).

This guide may not be used for commercial purposes.

Appendix A

Things to Consider as You Begin To Plan - More Details

High-quality internships and apprenticeships are designed to provide the following:

- **Real World Exposure.** How will you provide a professional experience for the intern/apprenticeship? What professional learning or activities might enrich their experience? How can you plan for them to gain exposure to the culture, protocols, and standards of your organization and industry?
- **Developing Professionalism.** Interns/apprentices benefit from explicit and transparent instruction on professional expectations. What professional expectations—spoken and unspoken—are part of your organization? How can you proactively communicate these professional expectations?
- **Social Capital and Networking Opportunities.** Building social capital is a vital component of internships/apprenticeships. How can you ensure they have formal and informal opportunities

to connect with professionals and employees in order to broaden their professional worldview? How can you support them in building a professional network during and after the internship/apprenticeship?

- **Organization and Industry Exposure.** How can you support the intern/apprentice in learning more about your company and industry? What can you teach them about preparing for and navigating your industry? What existing activities would help them learn about your company and the broader industry?
- **Career Ladders.** Interns/apprentices benefit from understanding the options available to them as young professionals. How can you share the career ladders and opportunities available in your industry? Are there people who could share their career stories? In what ways can you communicate opportunities and the preparation/education needed to gain access to them?
- **Technology Transfer.** Hosting interns/apprentices can help bridge a workplace generation gap. What could your employees teach or share with a young professional? What might they learn from the experience of working with an intern? Where could you leverage their insight to provide insight into your current website/social platforms?

In your design, build in space, time, and resources to:

- **Support Learning.** Encourage and support the learning components of the internship, including the use of a work plan to establish clear expectations. This [Internship Work Plan Template](#) may be modified, as needed. You may use your engagement with school leaders to determine appropriate learning and skill development objectives.
- **Provide Dedicated Mentor/Supervisor(s).** Designate one or more employee(s) to serve as supervisor/mentor. Select supervisors/mentors who have the content experience and expertise combined with the skills to work with young professionals: patience, enthusiasm, and positive communication skills. A successful mentor likes to teach, is willing to grow their managerial skills, and is motivating. They have strong communication skills, are comfortable with evaluation and feedback, and understand that mistakes are part of the learning process.
- **Schedule Time for Supervision and Feedback.** Provide regular supervision and coaching. Consider scheduling weekly/bi-weekly meetings. Provide an evaluation of the student's performance midway and at the end of the internship.
- **Purposeful Projects.** Assign duties that are progressive, challenging, and related to the student's area of interest. Consider current activities and ongoing work in your organization that a young professional could perform with reasonable training and mentorship. Interns/apprentices thrive when offered a project to complete that is developmentally appropriate, challenging, and contributes in a meaningful way to your organization. What project would help the intern/apprentice develop professional skills while contributing to your organization in a meaningful way? What professional activities can they be included in as an observer or a participant? How can their work be contextualized within the framework of the organization to imbue it with meaning? See [University of Washington Sample Intern Projects](#) for an example of a purposeful project.

- **Space and Equipment.** Make available the equipment, supplies, and space necessary for the intern to perform their duties with a sense of professionalism.
- **Follow the Department of Labor’s guidelines.** Review [Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act](#) carefully if considering unpaid internships.
- **Permission Forms and Waivers.** If you are bringing on a high school intern, the high school is responsible for obtaining completed permission forms and waivers from the intern’s parent or guardian. Copies will be provided to you. If your organization requires any additional permission forms, disclosures, waivers, or the like, please discuss these with the school and coordinate parent/guardian communication, as appropriate.
- **Plan For Privacy.** Take special care that interns understand privacy requirements for their role. For high-school students, confirm specific requirements with your HR department (e.g. many minors may have limitations with certain technology platforms or HIPAA requirements). Be clear about any specific technology or social media privacy implications for interns.
- **Intern Handbook.** Consider creating a succinct handbook to communicate key organization policies (including workplace safety) and professional expectations. This transparency is important for young professionals who may be unfamiliar with workplace culture and expectations. A good rule of thumb is to not assume any workplace knowledge.
- **Intern Survey.** Gathering baseline data from your interns/apprentices can support understanding whether the program is meeting your talent recruitment and development goals. Consider taking time to survey interns/apprentices at the start and conclusion of the program, as this helps to measure individual growth and program outcomes. If desired, use or adapt this [Intern/Apprentice Survey](#) to align to the goals of your program.

Launch & Orient

A regularly scheduled check-in between the intern and their supervisor/mentor ensures support, professional development, and just-in-time coaching and feedback. This time creates space for the supervisor to also provide mentoring. Consider a supportive format for these meetings that address the following components:

- CONVEY appreciation and information.
- CONFER on goals and progress, and share professional feedback.
- COACH to professional development with a developmental context.
- CONCLUDE each meeting in a manner that encourages reflection on work and celebration of accomplishments and sets a direction for the work to come.

This structure provides focus for the 45-60 minute meeting, and ensures interns have a baseline experience, and that the time is an investment that develops potential employees. Building relationships and trust is essential in developing a meaningful and effective supervisor/mentor relationship. Your program can also provide group check-ins and shared learning opportunities if hosting groups of interns.

An agenda for a strong orientation may want to include the following:

- Send a letter to welcome new interns
- Plan and provide a strong intern orientation which could include a low-stakes launch experience (lunch, coffee, etc.)
- Consider the training and support supervisors and mentors will need and schedule this in advance
- Engage other employees and team members formally or informally to support the intern
- Consider scheduling informal and formal networking opportunities.

Conclude & Celebrate

Consider the following when concluding and planning a celebration to end the WBL opportunity:

- Plan a thoughtful closing event.
- Have interns and supervisors or mentors complete an evaluation survey.
- Develop a follow-up plan to keep in touch.
- Provide transition for those interns who will be offered a position.
- Stay in touch with young people who may actualize their potential in the years to come.
- Consider a low-stakes closure event, such as a lunch or setting aside time after a staff meeting for a farewell and celebration.
- Invite interns to share their experience by presenting a project or highlighting an example of the work done during their internship. This can be at a staff meeting or a special closing lunch. This helps the intern to reflect and practice their presentation skills while promoting the program to staff (and future mentors).
- Invite the supervisor or mentor to highlight the positive professional qualities of the intern, note growth and contribution, and thank them for their contribution. Invite other team members to express appreciation and offer concrete examples of contribution and success. Consider offering interns a certificate of completion.
- “A celebration without a cake is just a meeting.” Even something small like donuts can make a closing event feel more special.
- Highlight programmatic successes (with specifics about each intern) in your organization email, webpage, Facebook/Instagram, and/or newsletter. This elevates and brings awareness to the internship program as well as the contributions of the interns. Interns also see their names in print!