Conducting an Asset Inventory

Identifying the assets available for your program – and building your program accordingly

As you plan out a partnership, determining which assets are available to fuel your program should be one of your first considerations; yet too often, this step happens closer to the end of the partnership development process. There are two main reasons for this: either program designers are so focused on building a program that they don't consider the role of resources in the equation, or they're focused on "pitching" a ready-made program. Each of these approaches ultimately limits the size and strength of your program.

In the first case, if you don't know what your partners can provide, you could end up with a resource "mismatch," such as a mentoring program pitched to a partner who has few employees interested in the time commitment, while the valuable used equipment they could have donated sits idle. In the second case, deciding on an outcome and a program model prior to seeking partners sounds convenient, but in reality it minimizes the contribution and sense of ownership they could bring.

Clearly, business partners must be given a role in the selection of outcomes and the design of the partnership program; not only does this increase their commitment to the project as co-owners, but it also gives you a chance to create the program in a way that takes advantage of all the resources your partners can make available to you.

Opening the Door to the Asset Discussion

As you talk with your partners, assets should never be the first item on the agenda: It is important to first find common ground in terms of desired student outcomes, along with a realization that all partners must receive some benefits from the relationship. That includes understanding what your partner needs from the relationship.

This line of inquiry is important for two reasons: first, it allows you to structure a program that can meet the needs of your partner, creating a return on their investment that will keep them committed over the long haul. And second, paying attention to the results they want to achieve creates an atmosphere of trust that is critical when asking about the resources they might want to contribute to the partnership.

Going Beyond Money

Financial support is always welcome, of course, but most experienced partnership leaders avoid asking for funds during the early stages of a relationship. Financial gifts limit engagement and commitment, and if you fail to build a strong foundation for the partnership, you'll end up seeing muted support and short-term interest on the part of your partners.

In reality, partners can provide support in a wide range of ways. As you explore what resources might be available for partnership design and management, look at the following:

Employee time

Look at the number of employees at local partner sites as well as their skills, time availability, and level of interest. You may find a volunteer force for classroom activities or improvement projects; mentors to work with students on professional or personal development; or even highly skilled specialists who can act as consultants to handle more challenging tasks. Professionals can help judge student projects and mentor student teams preparing for regional or national competitions.

Donated goods and services

Consider how some businesses structure their contributions to causes they consider to be worthy. When asked for support, airlines are sometimes willing to donate free tickets, which can help nonprofits defray costs or which can be raffled off as fundraisers, while restaurants may provide food for volunteers or vouchers which again can be used in raffles or giveaways. Businesses could also donate airline miles to help students or teachers travel for special conferences or competitions. In each case, these organizations are leveraging the assets they have in greatest supply, and that cost them the least to provide. You should pursue this line of thinking by looking for the assets your partners can most easily contribute and consider how they can tie in to your work.

Other product/service donations

Look beyond the products or services your partner provides and consider what goes into their production in order to find potential hidden assets. If they manufacture products, do they have used equipment they could donate, or would they invite your CTE instructors to existing on-site trainings in the latest techniques? Can service providers help you find better pricing on materials you both buy? Do these partners have unused office space you can use in some way?

Expertise and strengths

Consider what strengths your partner company may have. These may be what your partner is known for, or they may be hidden strengths that nevertheless could provide great value to your work. For example, newspaper companies are known for their journalistic and publishing capabilities, but a lesser-known strength is their expertise in logistics - getting thousands of newspapers to readers and retailers each day.

The key when holding a discussion about available assets is to assure your partner that you're not trying to squeeze every resource out of them: you're simply trying to design a program that can have as much impact as possible, which means working with the resources that are easiest for partners to contribute.

This article was written by Brett Pawlowski and Hans Meeder of the National Center for College and Career Transitions. It is one in a series of articles and resources developed for the CTE Employer/Education Engagement Project, sponsored by the CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York.

1585 Route 146 • Rexford, NY 12148 • Phone: 518-723-2137 • Fax: 518-723-2140 • **ctetac@spnet.us**