



## Work-based Learning Jumpstart

See this full resource guide online at:

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/work-based-learning>

Work-based learning is an established component in youth programs. Education and training programs include work-based learning experiences to help youth gain basic work place skills, strengthen basic skills such as math and reading through applied learning, gain knowledge of specific occupational skills; and develop an understanding of different industries. Quality work-based learning experiences help youth connect what they learn in the classroom to the world of work, learn skills that employers value, and lead to informed career choices.

Program administrators need to ensure that the work-based learning opportunities that their programs offer are well-constructed, in order to meet the needs of the youth they serve. Reaching scale and ensuring quality are complex undertakings that no single entity or organization can do solely on its own. Community connections and interagency collaborations are important. Here are some considerations and some tips for designing work-based learning programs.

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## Questions

### 1. What are the different types of work-based learning experiences?

Work-based learning experiences share some basic attributes. They are part of an organized program of study sponsored by an education or training entity. The knowledge gained through the work-based learning experience is linked to the classroom or planned program of study. There are established learning objectives, and these experiences provide youth with exposure to careers within industries. Work-based learning experiences can range in intensity and duration, and often this is determined by the age of the youth and the stage they are at in their program of study. The workplace is a unique learning laboratory but simulated worksites

can also be used. One way to think about the types of work-based learning is to group them into categories.

### Categories of Work-Based Learning

- **Visits to Workplace** - These tend to be a less intensive form of work-based learning that is mostly observational and generally most appropriate for younger youth. Included are field trips, which are one-time visits to observe, and job shadowing, which may range in duration from a day or less to sometimes multiple visits to observe by following or “shadowing” a worker.
- **Work-like Experiences** - These experiences can vary greatly in both duration and intensity, but, in general, they are more in-depth than visits to the workplace. These experiences can be structured for any age youth, depending upon the duration and level of supervision provided to the youth. Service learning projects and unpaid internships provide youth with the opportunity to develop leadership, citizenship and basic skills. These experiences may or may not have a specific career focus. Youth-run enterprises are simulated workplace experiences designed to give youth employment and management experience.
- **Employment** - These tend to be the more intensive forms of work-based learning and are appropriate for youth 14 and older. Included are both subsidized and unsubsidized work opportunities such as internships. Employment experiences must comply with state and federal labor laws. Cooperative education, paid internships, and apprenticeship programs are examples of employment-based learning experiences. Youth jobs, particularly summer jobs, provide valuable work experience and help youth develop the basic work-readiness skills and attitudes that employers say they value.

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## 2. How can I ensure that work-based learning experiences are well-structured and meet the needs of the youth I serve?

Work-based learning doesn't happen on its own. Mere exposure to the workplace doesn't necessarily translate into learning. Youth need structure and support if they are to fully benefit from their work-based experiences. This structure and support must come from both the school or program and the work site. Work-based learning experiences will be most meaningful if the youth themselves are involved in the planning, development, and evaluation of the experiences. Use youth advisory councils and student organizations as ways to involve youth. Here are some of the basics that need to be covered.

- **Preparing youth for the workplace** - At a minimum, youth should be provided with an orientation to the workplace and what is expected of them. This orientation should include information about the industry and the careers within the industry. It is particularly important that youth who are participating in internships and employment-related experiences receive information about health and safety on the job, their rights, and program and employer expectations. Work-readiness training is valuable for youth to learn about the behaviors and attitudes that employers expect.
- **Preparing program staff and employers** - Orientation and training for program staff and employers help those who work directly with the youth to understand their roles and responsibilities. Work-site mentors and supervisors need to understand how to guide and support learning, provide constructive feedback, evaluate youth performance, and how to resolve issues that may arise. Program staff need to know how to develop and implement structured learning plans, work with employers, and understand all applicable federal and state laws, such as the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- **Structuring the learning** - Training agreements and training or learning plans are tools used to structure work-based learning experiences. Training agreements are documents that describe the general terms under which employers, programs and schools, and youth will complete a work experience. These agreements are typically signed by the employer and/or job supervisor, the program coordinator or teacher, the youth and if the youth is under the age of reason (18 in most, but not all states) the parent or guardian. Training or learning plans establish learning objectives. The SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) competencies are often used as a basis for developing learning objectives. Training or learning plans may also include learning outcomes, activities, and a method for assessment and evaluation of the youth's performance. The duration and intensity of the work-based learning experience determine how extensive and detailed the training or learning plans should be. Finally, youth need time to reflect on their experiences and evaluate their performance. This may be informal or formal written evaluation - covering such topics as what did I learn; how does it relate to what I learned in the classroom; what does it mean for my future?
- **Undertaking program evaluation** - Is the work-based learning achieving its purposes? Ongoing program evaluation allows program administrators to make judgments about the quality of a program and how to make improvements. Involving staff, youth, employers and jobsite supervisors is key to good program evaluation. Developing a set of tracking tools will facilitate the assessment of learning, document the links between the worksite and the classroom, and streamline program evaluation.
- **Reporting the results** - Workforce Investment Boards, Boards of Education, and other policy makers should be kept informed of the results of work-based learning experiences in terms of number of youth served and successful outcomes. These reports will facilitate the sharing of best practices, keep the work-based learning program on the radar screen, and improve your program's chances for future support.



### 3. What community supports and interagency collaborations are necessary so that my youth have the opportunity to participate in quality work-based learning experiences?

In every community, a wide array of organizations are involved in preparing young people for the world of work, such as the public schools, technical schools, colleges, and universities, vocational rehabilitation agencies, labor/management programs, community-based organizations, and Job Corp Centers. Coordinating efforts among organizations reduces the confusion and frustrations for employers who must deal with multiple contacts. It is also a more efficient and effective way to develop and support the availability of work-based learning experiences for all youth within a community. Local activities that can and should be coordinated among organizations include, convening local leadership, recruiting and engaging employers, providing services to workplace partners, ensuring quality of work-based learning, and promoting policies and effective practices. Every community has organizations and resources that can be tapped to provide these “intermediary” activities. Here are some ideas:

### Utilize these Organizations & Resources to Develop & Support WBL

- **Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs)** are the lead strategic planning workforce development organization for local communities. WIBs are uniquely positioned to focus attention on promoting work-based learning, to support strategic planning between the “supply” (program) and “demand” (employer) sides, to identify resources available to support work-based learning; to develop policies supporting work-based learning and to disseminate effective practices.
- **American Job Centers** are the gateway to an array of workforce development information and services for both employers and job seekers. American Job Centers can be the repository for common tools for structuring work-based learning experiences and provide information on available work-based learning opportunities within the community. <http://jobcenter.usa.gov/>
- **Employer organizations**, such as the local Chamber of Commerce can be helpful in promoting work-based learning among its membership. Employer organizations can also undertake some of the brokering services between the school or program and the work site, such as student referrals, training for workplace mentors and supervisors, and payroll functions.
- **Student organizations**, particularly those that are vocationally-focused, such as DECA and VICA, can assist in connecting students from multiple schools and organizations with employers that match the students’ vocational interests.
- **Community-based organizations** provide employment and training for the emerging workforce, for current workers, and for those workers seeking to make a career change. Many of these organizations have long-established relationships with employer or are well-positioned to provide services to workplace partners.

Youth often receive (or are eligible for) services from more than one organization. For example, youth programs under the Workforce Investment Act provide services to youth who are enrolled in secondary school and those who are out of school. For in-school youth, the program services typically include summer employment or paid internships. Thus, the WIA service provider who is providing the work-based learning experience should coordinate with appropriate school personnel to make sure it is tied to classroom learning and supports the student's school-based program of study. Interagency collaboration is also helpful in leveraging resources to support youth with their work-based learning experiences. Transportation, health needs, work tools and equipment, day care, and job coaches are among the services that can be provided through interagency collaborations. Many communities, under the direction of their local WIBs or youth councils, have begun resource mapping projects, including the services that are available within the community and how to connect to these services. A guide to community services is a useful tool for program staff who work with youth.

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#### 4. What are my responsibilities and what are the employer's responsibilities in working with youth with disabilities?

Research documents that youth with disabilities who participate in work-based learning are more likely to successfully enter the workforce and are less likely to require public support to live independently. Thus, it is important that youth with disabilities have access to and participate in the same high-quality work-based learning programs established for all eligible youth. Administrators, program staff, and employers need to be aware of their legal responsibilities under applicable federal laws such as:

- **Fair Labor Standards Act** governs wages for all workers and includes “Child Labor Laws” that specify the type of work and hours permitted for youth under the age of 18.
- **Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act** mandates the recipients' obligations throughout their vocational education programs. Any entity receiving Perkins is subject to its requirements. The Act contains equity provisions and provisions for special populations which apply to individuals with disabilities.
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in federally-funded programs.
- **The Americans with Disabilities Act** prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability status and requires the provision of “reasonable accommodations” to insure that individuals with disabilities are provided access and participation in program and employment opportunities.
- **The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)** entitles all eligible youth to free appropriate and public education and requires specially designed instruction to meet the needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom and other settings. Starting at age 14, IDEA requires transition services that are a coordinated set of activities that promote the movement from school to post-school activities.

The descriptions provide only a snapshot of information, not enough upon which to make programmatic decisions. Other federal legislation may apply, and there may be state laws that also apply. The important lesson is that there is a legal and ethical obligation to ensure

that youth with disabilities receive the same opportunities as everyone else. Some tips for making it happen:

- In preparing youth with disabilities, **it is important that these young people understand their disability**, are able to talk about their disability, and are able to articulate to employers what they will contribute to the workplace.
- Training for program staff and for employers must **include specific information around serving youth with disabilities** to ensure that these youth receive the same benefits from program participation. It is important to **provide examples of individuals with disabilities who are successful professionals** throughout the work-based learning experience. This can be done by incorporating staff with disabilities, including examples of successful professional with disabilities, in all training components, and by inviting employers to involve employees with disabilities.
- For youth with disabilities, the learning plan should **connect to the student's Individualized Education Program/Transition plan when possible**. Linking with a student's transition plan can help identify and access supports that may be needed.
- **Interagency Transition Collaboratives in many states and local communities can assist in addressing the procedural and practice issues that influence transition services for youth with disabilities.**

Keep in mind that there is no “one size fits all” when serving youth with disabilities. The needs of each young person must be assessed individually. One of the best ways of determining a young person's needs is to ask them and to involve their parents in the discussion. This can also be helpful in determining what other agencies can do to help support work-based learning, the resources that they can provide and the accommodations or modifications that are needed.

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## 5. How do federal and state labor laws apply to work-based learning?

Federal and state laws regulate employment. The Fair Labor Standards Act covers minimum wage, overtime, child labor, and equal pay. States also have their own labor standards laws. The general rule is that the more stringent law, federal or state, is the one that applies. It is important to be familiar with both the federal and state labor standards laws as there are many rules that apply to youth in the workplace.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA) applies to employers and governs workplace safety and health issues. OSHA and its state partners set and enforce standards for workplace safety and health. Provisions governing equal access, nondiscrimination, workers' compensation, and legal status for work may also apply to a work-based learning experience. Each labor law defines those who are covered under the law. One important consideration is whether the work-based learning experiences is considered “employment.” Consider, particularly, the following:

- **Employment vs. unpaid internships** - There are a number of criteria that determine whether an “employment” relationship exists and thus subject to compliance with labor standards laws. There is no single set of rules that cover all situations and there are special rules that apply to persons with disabilities. Considerations include whether the work is incidental to the training, whether any employee has been displaced, or whether a vacancy has been filled. Workplace activities that do not

involve the performance of work are not considered employment subject to labor standard laws.

- **Child Labor Laws** - Federal and state laws limit the hours that young people can work and restrict the type of work that youth can perform. Youth under 14 are not permitted to work, with some limited exceptions. Minors under 16 are restricted from most machinery and manufactory work and minors under 18 are prohibited from working in hazardous occupations. Permitted work hours are different for 14 and 15 year olds than for 16 and 17 year olds and for school hours versus non-school hours. A work permit may be needed. There are some exceptions to the child labor laws for student learners in approved work-study programs.
- **Minimum wage** - Minimum wage and overtime laws apply to work-based learning experiences that meet the definition of employment. Some states set a higher minimum wage than the federal law. There are certain exceptions for initial employment or training and youth under the age of 20. There are some additional exceptions when youth with disabilities are engaged in “community-based vocational education.” However, these exceptions are very explicit and need to be thoroughly understood before utilized.
- **Safety and access** - All parties involved in work-based learning are responsible for ensuring that the workplace is safe and does not discriminate. Youth should have equal access to work-based learning opportunities regardless of race, religion, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. Once in the workplace, youth should know that there is an expectation that they will be free from discriminatory practices and sexual harassment. The necessary insurance coverage should be provided for youth involved in work-based learning activities ranging from Workers Compensation coverage for youth in paid employment to liability coverage for youth participating in unpaid internships, job shadows or site visits. The type of work-based learning experience, whether it is paid or unpaid, and federal and state guidelines will determine the type of coverage needed.

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## Work-Based Learning Example

At the [Pima Vocational High School](#) in Tucson, Arizona, structured work-based learning experiences are fully integrated into the curriculum. This alternative charter high school provides high school dropouts, ages 17 - 21, with a high school diploma and prepares them to enter the work force. The student population includes homeless youth, teen parents, and youthful offenders. **Almost 30% of the youth have a disability**, mostly specific learning disabilities.

**The program is organized in three modules**, each of which includes academic, vocational, and work-based learning. Work-based learning experiences become increasingly more intensive as students move through the modules.

1. The first experience on a work crew introduces youth to the world of work and teaches basic skills.
2. Job shadowing experiences during the second module provide an opportunity for career exploration.
3. A paid internship then provides real world work experience.

Each work-based learning module includes specific learning objectives and employer evaluations, which are used to address student skill deficiencies. Academics are taught using workplace examples, and students learn job readiness skills in vocational classes.

Pima is a new school, enrolling its first class in the 2000 - 2001 school year. Since then 39 students have graduated, and of those, 12 are enrolled in post-secondary programs, and 16 are working. The vocational education coordinator says “Many times, having a work placement is the one activity that turns the students around and helps them see the importance of academics, as well as positive communication skills.”