

EMPLOYER'S GUIDE TO WORK-BASED LEARNING

Northern Kentucky
Career Jumpstart

How Your
Business Can
Connect With
**Tomorrow's
Workforce**



www.nkycareerjumpstart.com

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is an educational approach that combines practical and theoretical job experience with classroom instruction, enabling participants to enhance their employability while also developing their academic and professional skills. The most common WBL types include job shadowing, internships, cooperative education, and apprenticeships.

Work-based learning provides participants with the opportunity to engage with employers and acquire essential employability and technical skills necessary for today's workforce simultaneously. A [2023 study](#) by the Strada Education Foundation found that participating in WBL is directly associated with higher wages after graduation, higher career satisfaction, and higher self-confidence.

As an employer, your WBL program could be the reason a student discovers the career they're passionate about. It could be the first step someone takes towards reaching the future they've always envisioned.

This guide serves as an introduction to creating that program. Here you can find WBL benefits, best practices, roles, responsibilities, and a glossary of definitions and explanations of the different types of WBL. It also includes links to find further resources provided by the state of Kentucky, such as specific legal documents and sample agreement forms.

We hope you find this guide helpful as you brainstorm, craft, and reflect on your work-based learning program.



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WORK-BASED LEARNING CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT

The WBL continuum outlines increasing levels of career exploration opportunities, starting with introductory experiences, and ending with long-term commitments. It shows ways to implement WBL at all stages of learning and the benefits gained at each level.

CAREER AWARENESS

Learning ABOUT Work

Build awareness of the careers available to broaden career seeker opinions

- Career Days
- Guest Speakers
- Career Fairs
- Career Simulations
- Clubs

CAREER EXPLORATION

Learning ABOUT Work

Explore career options to inform career seeker decision-making

- Interactive Experiences
- Tours
- Job Shadowing
- Informational Interviews

CAREER EXPOSURE

Learning THROUGH Work

Apply learning through practical experience that develops knowledge and skills necessary for success in chosen careers

- Internships
- Youth Leadership
- Service-Based Learning
- Project-Based Learning
- School-Based Enterprises
- Essential Skills Training

CAREER EXPERIENCE

Learning FOR Work

Train for employment and/or post-secondary education in a specific range of occupations

- Clinicals/Practicums
- Co-Ops
- Pre-apprenticeships
- Essential Skills Training
- Resume Development
- Interview Preparation

PARTICIPANT BENEFITS

Observing industry professionals helps WBL participants gain important insights into their future careers and the skills required to succeed. WBL is crucial for helping career seekers develop essential soft skills like communication and teamwork.

WBL also allows career seekers to:

- Gain **exposure to the world of work**
- Connect classroom **learning to the world of full-time work**
- Practice **skills in real-world scenarios**
- Explore **different industry sectors** and learn about **careers within these sectors**
- **Gain experience** that reinforces and **contributes to career-path** plan
- Build their **resume**
- Earn **school credits** while also gaining **valuable work experience**
- Discover **strengths, aptitudes, and talents**
- Develop essential **employability skills**
- **Network** with potential employers
- Work with **equipment and technology** that **may not be available at school**
- **Earn money while they learn**

“My internship was instrumental towards gaining the confidence I needed to take the next step in my career. It cleared up any fears I had about the world of work while giving me the opportunity to complete impactful tasks and build out my network.”

Meredith Ruhland, 2025 NKY Works Intern

EMPLOYER BENEFITS

While WBL is greatly impactful for participants, there are numerous benefits for employers as well. Namely, WBL can reduce risks associated with hiring and ensure that new employees are well-prepared for their roles.

It also allows employers to:

- **Create awareness of** and **exposure** to their industry
- Close the **skills gap**
- Develop more **robust talent pipelines**
- Boost **job retention**
- **Give back** to the community
- **Influence school curriculum** to ensure that it **covers the skills** workers need **to succeed** in roles at an organization
- Boost **productivity and motivation** of current employees
- Help participants **develop essential employability skills**
- Encourage students to **stay in their community**
- **Cultivate diversity in the talent pipeline** by providing the structure, support, and training that people of different backgrounds need to succeed
- **Provide low-cost training and development** for potential full-time employees – **'grow your own'** talent
- **Observe** potential employees **BEFORE hiring** them
- Have **access to job candidates who have the hands-on experience** you're seeking
- Earn a **reputation as a great place to work**
- Contribute to the **creation of a skilled regional workforce**

WORK-BASED LEARNING BEST PRACTICES

Once you have decided to develop your WBL opportunity, follow these best practices to ensure your program runs smoothly and maximizes the benefits gained by all participants.

Identify the point-of-contact person or department within the company to lead your WBL strategy

Having a point-of-contact will help:

- Build and strengthen relationships with schools and community partners
- Enable more efficient and timely communication

Provide worksite mentors

Worksite mentors can help participants:

- Feel connected to and supported by the organization
- Explore varying career paths within the company
- Work through frustration and conflicts on the job

Provide participants with real work assignments

WBL assignments should:

- Be challenging
- Be recognized by your organization as valuable
- Fill the entire work term

Set clear expectations

With clear expectations, students:

- Understand what's expected of them, giving them confidence
- Monitor themselves and take more responsibility for their behavior
- Gain a sense of safety and security

Provide proper information needed for participant success

Useful info for participants includes:

- Company protocol on absences, tardiness, etc.
- General professionalism – dress code/PPE; cell phone usage, etc.
- Feedback and evaluation process

WORK-BASED LEARNING BEST PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

Establish ROI measures to fuel WBL improvement and expansion

Measuring ROI will show the ways that WBL initiatives:

- Support the company's existing goals
- Advance the company's overall goals

Recognize the opportunity to create stronger relationships with local schools & community agencies

By partnering with schools and community agencies, employers are able to:

- Create larger talent pipelines
- Ensure better qualified candidates
- Form a greater connection with the community

Pursue & elevate WBL as a strategic talent acquisition vehicle

A successful WBL program can become an organization's most productive:

- Talent identification system
- Employee acquisition avenue

Be aware of the youth employment laws for your state

Youth employment laws and insurance requirements may vary based on:

- Industry
- State
- Participant age

Design to reach participants from multiple backgrounds and experiences

WBL can be a key vehicle that allows employers to:

- Expand beyond typical recruitment channels
- Reach broader populations of career seekers

WBL ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES

For Participants

- Complete school-based training in essential (soft) skills prior
- Apply to an organization that relates to a chosen career pathway
- Participate collaboratively in the creation of a training plan with expectations, goals, and objectives
- Establish a transportation plan
- Sign a site agreement, if required
- Create and add to a portfolio over the course of the program term
- Provide work reports and evaluation forms to be completed by your supervisor if required

For Educational Partners

- Create a training plan with expectations, goals, and objectives
- Contact and meet with organization supervisor to explain training plan
- Create and sign a site agreement, if required
- Help implement the training plan
- Visit potential sites before placing students with business
- Conduct visits to business location during WBL term
- Provide all required legal and other documentation

For Organization Supervisors

- Meet with educational partner to review training plan with expectations, goals, and objectives
- Assess and help implement training plan
- Sign a site agreement, if required
- Ensure safe and sanitary workplace conditions
- Provide safety instructions to the participant for all tasks and duties to be performed
- Monitor participant attendance
- Discuss the participant's progress with the educational partner
- Complete evaluation for participant after completion of program, if requested

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Information Interview/Guest Speaker

Duration: 0.5 - 1 hour

Definition/Rationale: A pre-planned and scheduled interview with an individual/panel from a business or industry sector that gives students the opportunity to learn more about and explore an industry. Guest speaker visits are typically early career awareness activities because they involve less student preparation and easier employer recruitment than some other forms of WBL. They are also well-suited as younger students' first introduction to WBL and to build awareness in many students at one time.

What to expect: If in a school, guest speakers often address one classroom for one class period (usually an hour) or a larger audience as part of an assembly. The experience can also take a panel format with multiple speakers providing different perspectives. Your presentation should be tailored to participant interests, ensuring the content is suitable for the age range you are addressing. Common topics to discuss include your educational background, your career path, skills needed to succeed in your role, and other jobs within your industry. Also, be prepared to offer a "Q&A" session at the end.

Resume Development/Critique

Duration: 1.5-2 hours

Definition/Rationale: Business partners help students develop an effective resume by providing an unbiased perspective, a focus on strategy, and constructive criticism. The primary goal of a resume critique is to identify areas of improvement, assess skill gaps, and offer actionable suggestions to enhance the resume's impact and to increase the participant's chances of landing a future interview.

What to expect: You will typically review several different resumes from participants early in their careers over the course of the event. Many of these students will likely have little to no experience with HR practices so your perspective can greatly increase their understanding. Focus on things you wish you would've known at their age to ensure helpfulness. While these events are not fully WBL by definition, they are avenues to build lasting relationships with local schools and organizations in the area.

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Mock Interview

Duration: 1.5 – 2 hours

Definition/Rationale: Students are paired one-on-one with a business partner who interviews each student as if he/she were being interviewed for a paid internship or job. Business partners help students to better understand the process of applying and interviewing for a job, providing feedback rooted in their own experience. Participants normally spend around fifteen minutes being interviewed and then receive immediate verbal feedback following the interview. The experience allows students to practice their interviewing skills and professional behaviors while at the same time developing a level of comfort in communicating with professionals.

What to expect:

When conducting a mock interview, get into character and be as realistic as possible based on your personal interview experiences. When giving feedback, consider delivery, body language, and ability to be concise. Create a positive environment as participants may have initial fears about interviews.

Mentoring

Duration: 1 – 1.5 hour sessions over months

Definition/Rationale: Students get matched with volunteer mentor(s) from the business community who work with them on a one-to-one/small group basis. Mentoring provides an avenue for developing voluntary partnerships between employers and schools. Mentoring also gives the mentor the opportunity to have a positive influence on the development of a young person. Above all, a mentoring experience provides young people with someone to look to for support and guidance while facing the challenges of becoming an adult

What to expect: As a mentor, you have the opportunity to strengthen your community by being a role model. This can lead to lower high school dropout rates, better attitudes about education, and higher college enrollment rates. Mentoring programs are often set up by local schools or community partners and choosing to be a mentor is a great way to foster a relationship with the organization. Be sure to focus on constructive criticism, active listening, and accountability. Set goals for your mentee when applicable to aid growth and leverage your network to set them up for success.

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Company Tour/Site Visit

Duration: 1.5-2 hours

Definition/Rationale: A highly structured career awareness activity in which students visit a workplace, learn about the business, meet employees, ask questions and observe work in progress. The student's primary role is to observe the workplace, listen to what the host has to say, ask questions, and think about potential career opportunities. Students' experiences with workplace tours can help guide their choices about additional career awareness and exploration activities as well as their higher education plans.

What to expect: When giving a company tour, potential aspects to focus on are your work in action, the culture of your organization, different careers at the site, and any other interesting components of your workplace. Depending on the size of the company, you may set up stations where different employees can offer hands-on activities while detailing their roles. You may also include a "Q&A" session at the end of the event to address any remaining questions.

Service Learning

Duration: 3 – 6 hours

Definition/Rationale: A teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Service learning is a concept that requires educators to recognize the capacity students have for curiosity, flexibility, humor, sincerity, creativity, enthusiasm and compassion which uniquely qualifies them to address many critical unmet needs in society. Instead of viewing students as passive recipients of education, service learning suggests that they be viewed as competent, capable producers and willing contributors.

What to expect: Service learning programs are often developed by schools to allow their students to give back to the community. These experiences should always link service and academic learning, meet your community's unique needs, provide concrete opportunities for young people to learn new skills and think critically, and involve students in planning from the earliest stages. If you feel as if your organization could benefit from students in service learning programs, reach out to your local high school or college to develop a partnership.

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Teacher Externship

Duration: 1 – 3 hours for one day to possibly a full summer

Definition/Rationale: Teachers are immersed in a company to learn about the skills and competencies needed to succeed in that industry or career path. Impacting just one teacher allows a company to reach between 20-150 students each year. Teachers improve their practices by incorporating new methods, labor market information, and employment skills that meet current industry standards. The goal of an externship is to bring an understanding of workplace practices and policies into the classroom, thus increasing the relevance of student learning.

What to expect: Externships range from the typical day of job shadowing to a longer, usually project-based experience that can last as long as a full summer. Bringing educators into the workplace provides them with numerous benefits while also providing employers with benefits as well. As an employer, a teacher externship can allow you to better understand the demands and challenges of education through the lens of an educator to ensure the next generation of employees become better prepared. It also provides connections to schools that can lead to further opportunities for work-based learning partnerships in the future.

Clinical Experience

Duration: TBD depending on school, usually 120-140 hours per semester

Definition/Rationale: Clinical experiences are found in health occupations and are designed to integrate meaningful work site experiences with prior knowledge. They are the first experiences for health science students to apply the skills learned in classroom and laboratory settings and are most commonly associated with nursing students. Clinical rotations allow students to work in various health care settings under the supervision of a clinical instructor. Clinical rotations can span several semesters or years, depending on the length and structure of the program.

What to expect: Completing clinicals allows the student to better understand complex patient needs, the disease process, and treatment plans. Before getting approved for the opportunity, students are highly trained in their specific field. As a clinical instructor, you will usually be responsible for around 4-10 students. Always provide constructive feedback and informative instruction to foster student learning, success, and retention.

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Career Fair

Duration: Around 3 hours

Definition/Rationale: A career/job fair is an event that gives students and employers a chance to meet one another, establish professional relationships, and discuss potential job/co-op/internship opportunities. The event can be internal (organized by the school) or external (organized by an employer, a group of employers, or a community partner)

What to expect: Local career fairs can be excellent events for promoting both WBL opportunities and also entry level positions. Many colleges host a career fair every semester and are well-equipped to cover most logistics associated with the event. As an employer, your main focuses should be on being informative and approachable. If hiring, you may consider promoting the specific positions ahead of time to ensure fair attendees aligned with your needs approach your booth. Be sure to bring business cards to encourage follow-ups and consider bringing promotional materials to entice attendees.

Job Shadowing

Duration: 3 – 6 hours

Definition/Rationale: Short-term opportunity for students to spend time with an individual in a chosen occupation in order to become familiar with the duties associated with this occupation, the physical setting, and the compatibility of the occupation with his or her own career goals. Shadowing is an opportunity for employers and schools to work together to aid the educational process, and for businesses to promote company culture and showcase occupations that are in-demand. They can also discuss items of interest and concern with the individual in this occupation and explore potential career paths.

What to expect: Shadowing is often the first look a participant gets at a certain workplace environment and career so encourage questions to ensure the experience is impactful. The experience should always be as realistic as possible so that the participant gets the full picture of what the job is like and can go on to make major career decisions as a result. Offering to allow students to shadow is a great way to foster a lasting partnership with local schools and can lead to partnering for more intensive WBL programs in the future.

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Internship

Duration: Varies: lasts weeks to a year

Definition/Rationale: Internships, which can be short or long-term, and paid or unpaid, give well-prepared students the opportunity to explore career-related work duties 'on-the-job', develop essential (soft) skills, and see if this career path is a good fit for them and is worth exploring further. Through the internship experience, the academic competencies needed to be successfully employed will also be highlighted, which may in turn result in increased motivation to learn academic subject matter.

What to expect: Often a culminating WBL experience, internship participants are usually well-prepared for the world of the workplace after learning best practices through their education or other job experiences. If hired from a program where school credit is earned from the internship, the intern likely completed prior professional development classes to prepare. Both college and high school interns also have a school-based supervisor that is another point of contact to ensure all goes well during the term. As internships consist of learning by doing, certain legal documentation may be necessary which can be found in the "Helpful Links" section on page 16

Cooperative Education (Co-Op)

Duration: Varies, 1 semester – 1 year

Definition/Rationale: Cooperative education is a paid educational program consisting of in-school instruction combined with program related on-the-job work experience in a business or industrial establishment. These are planned experiences supervised by the school and the employer to ensure that each phase contributes to the student's career pathway.

What to expect: Developing a co-op program will introduce potential future workers to job opportunities with your company, bring new energy and a fresh perspective to your workplace, provide opportunities for existing workers to develop supervisory skills, and promote an understanding of the role and contributions of your business in the community. While co-ops are paid experiences, the return on investment comes from increased revenue and productivity from the participant's work and lower recruitment costs when hiring full-time.

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINITIONS

Apprenticeship/Pre-Apprenticeship

Duration: Weeks to full school year for pre, 1 – 4 years for full apprenticeship

Definition/Rationale: In a pre-apprenticeship, individuals prepare to meet requirements for success in a apprenticeship by learning basic industry skills, interacting with tools used on the job and developing employability skills. They may be paid or unpaid and are often shorter than full apprenticeship. Upon completion of the program, individuals become more qualified candidates for an apprenticeship and more likely to succeed once accepted into the program. Career seekers can apply to an apprenticeship without completing a pre-apprenticeship. It consists of paid on-the-job learning experiences paired with supplemental classroom instruction. Specific Registered Apprenticeships are approved and validated by the U.S. Department of Labor or a state apprenticeship agency and result in a nationally recognized certificate of completion.

What to expect: Pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships provide productive value for an employer as they can minimize liability costs through appropriate training of workers, lead to tax credits and employee tuition benefits in participating states, and create flexible training options. Employers should view apprenticeships as a capital investment to account for both short- and long-run costs and benefits, as well as indirect costs and benefits. As apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships consist of learning by doing, certain legal documentation may be necessary. This information can be found in the “Helpful Links” section below.

Helpful Links

For more information on WBL, the state of Kentucky provides an [extensive guide](https://www.education.ky.gov/CTE/cter/Pages/WBL.aspx) (<https://www.education.ky.gov/CTE/cter/Pages/WBL.aspx>)

Official WBL program standards as outlined by KY legislature can be found [here](https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/kar/titles/803/001/100/) (<https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/kar/titles/803/001/100/>)

State regulations when working with WBL participants from the ages of 14-18 can be found [here](https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/kar/titles/803/001/100/) (<https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/kar/titles/803/001/100/>)

Other forms provided by the state can be found at the WBL Resource Page [here](https://www.education.ky.gov/CTE/cter/Pages/WBL-Res.aspx) (<https://www.education.ky.gov/CTE/cter/Pages/WBL-Res.aspx>)

ABOUT NKY CAREER JUMPSTART

Your WBL opportunities can be posted onto the [NKY Career Jumpstart](http://www.NKYCareerJumpstart.com) website (www.NKYCareerJumpstart.com) to reach career seekers in the area.

The site serves as a platform to connect local talent of all ages in Northern Kentucky with work-based learning opportunities of all levels.

Experiences to post on the platform include:

- Job shadowing opportunities
- Internships
- Co-ops
- Pre-apprenticeships
- Apprenticeships

While these opportunities are often thought to be solely for college students, NKY Career Jumpstart is built with all in mind. The site is open to all career seekers, enabling all populations in the area to forge a future they can be proud of.

We encourage you to establish a presence on the site. Go to NKYCareerJumpstart.com and select the “Provider Login” to get started. Or contact us at NKYWorks@NKADD.org to discuss your specific work-based learning opportunities

Join today to reach your workforce of tomorrow.

For additional information, **please contact:**

NKYWorks@NKADD.org
or
859.657.WRKS (9757)