

Employer Engagement Tip Sheet #4:

Meeting with Employers

This is the fourth of five employer engagement tip sheets which feature highlights from the [Youth CareerConnect \(YCC\) Employer Engagement Handbook](#), first released in December 2015. All employer engagement tip sheets can be found on the [YCC Community of Practice](#).

Prepare to Meet an Employer

Once you have a sense of what is required to cultivate an employer relationship and have identified potential partners, it is time to prepare to meet with them. Do some in-depth research before arranging a meeting. Study any information you have already collected with your team. Then, explore company websites to become familiar with their:

- Products and services.
- Size and structure: Public or privately owned? Family-run? Part of a larger corporation?
- Financial fitness: Growing? Maintaining? Downsizing?
- Number and types of employees.
- Names and titles of senior management.
- Recent news or other helpful information.

Determine the most appropriate individual to contact and, if possible, ask for an introduction by a friend or colleague.

Establish an Agenda

Plan for no more than two or three people to meet with the potential partner, and make sure your team or project leader is included. Hold a pre-meeting among yourselves to prepare and develop an agenda. (See sample agenda below.) Be sure to find out how many people will be attending on the employer side and share your agenda and any promotional materials in advance so they can prepare as well. Be respectful of your counterpart's schedule and mindful of the role they play in the organization. Have a clear understanding of:

- **Who** will be representing the employer so you can prepare questions they can answer and provide information they will consider relevant.
- **What** you hope to accomplish with them. They may not be the decision maker, so this may just be a foot in the door. You may need to request a second meeting to move forward.
- **Why** the partnership will be of benefit to their organization. (See [Tip Sheet #3: Understanding and Developing Employer Relationships](#).)

Sample Agenda for Initial Meeting With a Potential Employer Partner

Note: An estimated time recommendation is found at the end of each section to help guide the management of the meeting and prevent it from being too long. A good total meeting length is 1¼ hours, but adapt the suggested times as needed.

- Introduce yourself and your colleagues and explain the purpose of your visit (4 minutes).
- Provide a brief description of your program and its community team process (10 – 15 minutes with questions from the employer).
- Explain your need for the employer's industry knowledge in developing and managing your program (1 minute).
- Ask questions to help you learn more about the employer (15 minutes).
 - Strengths, market targets, products/services
 - Size of business and number of employees
 - Skill shortages the employer is currently experiencing and future shortages anticipated
 - The employer's current plans to close employee skill gaps, such as an internal training system and/or industry association training
- Describe the specific benefits of your program to the employer (10 minutes with questions).
 - Access to a larger pool of skilled job candidates who would possess the specific skills, certificates, and credentials required for current and future job openings
 - Training, credential, and certification programs designed with the employer's input and for the specific industry and standards involved, and adapted over time to better meet the employer's needs
- Explain in detail what membership in the program team would involve (10 minutes with questions).
 - Estimated time commitment
 - Type and frequency of meetings
 - Type of help and resource assistance the employer might be asked to provide.
- If the employer appears interested in joining the team, clearly explain the next steps toward a commitment (5 minutes).
- General discussion and review (10 minutes).
- As the meeting ends, be sure to thank the attendees from the employer's side for their time and interest. They may be valuable contacts even if the employee does not establish a partnership with you, and can be a source of other contacts (5 minutes).

Work Toward a Commitment

If you sense during your meeting that there is good potential for a partnership, raise the issue of a commitment in closing. However, be aware that this may not happen at the first meeting. Regular communications are critical to relationship building, and your progress may be gradual. What is needed during this time is patience and attention to the employer's questions, ideas, needs, and circumstances. Achieving a commitment will most likely occur only after your potential partner:

- Clearly grasps the intent and processes of your program.
- Believes your program will benefit the company mission and integrate with its operations.
- Understands in detail what is expected from them in time and resources.
- Has support from management and any affected staff.

Once the employer begins to suggest ways they might contribute, this may be a sign that discussing a commitment is appropriate.

Follow Up

One or two days after the meeting, send a note thanking the participants for their time, outlining the action items you will be following up on, and stating when they should expect to hear from you again. You may also want to include any action items the employer may have agreed to and let them know you are looking forward to hearing from them.

Move Forward

A commitment from an employer produces a new set of tasks for your team. As you further communicate with your new partner and learn more about them, you will begin to ascertain the depth and intent of their interest. You will more fully understand exactly what they seek from the partnership. Moreover, you will continue to clarify your program and demonstrate how the employer can contribute to it in ways that will benefit both of you. Information about deepening and maintaining your partnerships is provided in [Tip Sheet # 5: Growing and Sustaining Employer Relationships](#).