National College Access Network

Building Connections. Advancing Equity. Promoting Success.

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Connecting College and Career Success

Implementing and Managing Services for Students

The college access field has its roots in helping students navigate the various obstacles in their paths of getting to college. Over time, our field expanded its focus to ensure that students complete a postsecondary education by providing success services. Today our field finds itself expanding once again to advance the connection between college and career success, a connection that encourages students to choose a field and career that will leave them personally and professionally satisfied and financially stable.

The National College Access Network, with the support of Strada Education Network, has pursued work that helps our members and our field connect college and career success. This work takes the form of case studies, webinars, white papers, and conference sessions that bring together diverse voices from across the NCAN membership to share their strategies and knowledge. One of these conference sessions took place at NCAN's National Conference in San Diego in September 2017. The session, "Connecting College and Career Success: Implementing and Managing Services for Students," focused on the concrete practices and policies that help programs initiate or advance their own career success programming. When it is time for a program to roll up its sleeves and get to work helping students get to their own work, what should programs do?

This brief focuses on the lessons learned from four presenters at this conference session. Each represented a different NCAN member program and each covered a different aspect of implementation and management.

- Antoinette Haygood (ACCESS College Foundation; Norfolk, VA) presented "Establishing Organizational Priorities," a discussion of how programs know when they want to grow and expand into a new direction of work and how they can tell if they are ready to do so.
- Charleita Richardson's (Partnership for the Future; Glen Allen, VA) "Managing Your Work" laid out processes programs can use to ensure students, staff, and business partners are aligned and working in the same direction.
- Vanessa Barbic (Students Rising Above; San Francisco, CA) presented "Preparing Your Advisors" for career success and focused on the topics advisors need to know, how to educate advisors on those topics, and concerns about mission creep.
- Teanna Dorsey (Genesys Works; Houston, TX) described the critical activity of "Partnering with Business" to provide meaningful work-based opportunities for students.

Along the way, this brief will also reference other career success resources available to NCAN members, many of which reside at www.collegeaccess.org/career.

Establishing Organizational Priorities

"When ACCESS College Foundation began, the mission of our founders was to get students to college and to help them financially, but we've expanded beyond Hampton Roads and Norfolk, and beyond that initial mission of college access," began Antoinette Haygood, Program Specialist for the College Success Program. ACCESS maintains a ladder of services, the bottom rung of which is its early awareness program that "plants the seed of college for our students who are in middle school." From there the program expands into more traditional college access services in high school (preparation for eventual high school graduation, standardized test preparation, financial aid awareness and education, completing college applications). When students enroll in, and matriculate to, a postsecondary institution, they continue to receive success supports to help them persist and complete.

Despite having an advisor who meets with students directly on 13 college campuses, the program's leadership and staff "want to make sure our students aren't just graduating, they're actually getting the job. Our ladder represents the evolution of ACCESS College Foundation." This spurred the program's expansion into career success. "We want to keep that continuum going," Haygood noted. "Our staff wants to know how we can better help our students."

Haygood used tennis legend Arthur Ashe's "Start where you are; use what you have; do what you can" as advice to programs considering an expansion into a new area. Once ACCESS decided to expand into career services, the staff surveyed former students to see where they were and what they were doing. They found that 76 percent of students surveyed were living locally. In addition, 21 percent were employed in healthcare, 15 percent in education, and 12 percent in finance. The results gave ACCESS staff two important pieces of information: a sense of the geographic area in which they would need to provide career success services, and the types of industries with which they would need connections to prepare students. Because so many of the program's alumni remained local, ACCESS can focus much, but not all, of its efforts on that local context.

Using this data and a strategic plan, ACCESS secured funding to launch "Career Connections." Before programs expand their services into the area of career success, staff should refer to their organization's logic model or theory of change to understand how this new work will fit into the organization's existing or broader programming.

Haygood explained the program-specific context:

> Sometimes in college access, we want to help everyone and do everything and help them to get it all. Sometimes it is when we are more specific that we are able to be more effective. We had to figure out what those specific actions were. Every program has goals; you have to identify yours.

ACCESS's specific goals were to:

- help students find jobs after graduation;
- build career preparation skills (including specifically developing interview and networking skills and resumes) and soft skills;
- create and strengthen partnerships with businesses in the area; and
- develop a "Career Connections Portal," a database that would bring together ACCESS-served students searching for positions and companies, organizations, and businesses searching for candidates.

For ACCESS, Career Connections required hiring a new coordinator to provide direct services to students in this area. That aspect was important to ACCESS because it is an organization with strong roots in providing in-person individual advising to students. The expansion into and provision of career success services had to be structured in a way that was beneficial to students and familiar to staff and program partners.

ACCESS was also deeply interested in securing buy-in for Career Connections from staff, students, and businesses. The aforementioned database came into play here, specifically for the *quid pro quo* it represented of connecting "really amazing" students with "rewarding" experiences. "We need to have a partnership that is strong on both ends – for students and businesses," Haygood asserted.

The broad strokes of goals and intentions laid out, ACCESS developed a 30-day plan to get the new effort off the ground. This plan included defining who would be served and how. ACCESS decided to focus the Career Connections coordinator's efforts on juniors and seniors in college. These students tend to be on a delicate career cusp and deciding between going to graduate school and exploring the job market. They tend to be searching hard for internships and co-ops. These students would be the first audience for Career Connections.

After establishing the audience for their services, ACCESS staff began to make connections with critical stakeholders. They met with members of their board of directors and the local chamber of commerce to inquire about opportunities for students. They attended career fairs and other events with local businesses to discover open positions. They also met with representatives from the career services offices at each campus they serve. They needed to reassure these professionals that they did not intend to encroach but instead wanted to work with them to make sure students were receiving the right message.

The last task to complete before implementing Career Connections was to determine the metrics by which ACCESS would measure success. They decided that the key metrics they wanted to track were:

- How many students are actually communicating with the Career Connections coordinator?

- How many students are applying to the internships offered to them via the Career Connections database?
- How many students obtain an internship or co-op through the Career Connections database?
- How many of these internships and co-ops turn into an actual position?

Key takeaways from Haygood's presentation include:

1. Look at your organization's model and see where you can be *specific*. Everyone wants to do everything, but how can you be specific?
2. Ensure that your expansion is true to your mission, your vision, and your organizational promise to students.
3. Consider how to obtain buy-in not just from your staff and the businesses you are recruiting, but also from students. Students have to believe that what you are doing is actually great for them.
4. Look at peers around you (especially other NCAN members) and see and learn from their best practices.

Managing Your Work

Each summer Partnership for the Future (PFF) manages more than 200 students placed at internships across 70 business partners. Processes and procedures are key to ensuring that those internships run smoothly both for students and businesses. Charleita Richardson, President and CEO of the Glen Allen, VA organization, devoted her portion of the Connecting College and Career Success conference session to outlining the processes and procedures that make her internship program tick.

"It's really about the matching process," Richardson explained about managing a successful internship program. Figure 1 maps the different stages that Partnership for the Future's program moves through each year.

Figure 1

A critical piece of internship management and, more broadly, college and career advising in general, is knowing your students. "Sometimes we take this for granted," Richardson admitted. "We're very simplistic, and it doesn't have to be overly complicated." PFF begins with a simple interests and skills questionnaire for students. It asks about their Microsoft Office skills, favorite and least favorite academic subjects, and specific skills and activities they think they might (or might not) like to experience in a professional environment. From there, students take the Jung Typology Test (based on Carl Jung's work and related to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment). Through this test, students gain insight into the way they experience the world, and PFF passes relevant information on to businesses. For example, students who are initially quiet or introverted may not always be that way once they acclimate to the workplace.

PFF staff then begin the process of knowing their business sponsors. They meet individually with each business to understand their open positions, desired skill sets, and special tasks and projects for students. Sponsors have their own information form to fill out. PFF needs to understand where students will be physically placed (so that if PFF needs to go on-site, staff know where to find the student) and who will be working with students. Finally, each company representative fills out a Myers-Briggs-esque evaluation for their company culture to understand better workplace dynamics and preferences (Figure 2 below).

Figure 2

ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE

To assist with the matching process, we've had all new PFF students complete a version of a personality type indicator. In order to best match students with your organization, we ask that you choose the **one** option in each **row** that best describes your organization's culture or what you look for in a PFF intern. While we know that many organizations can appreciate to some degree all of the qualities below, and that everyone uses both sides of the scale, one is often preferred and more prevalent. Please honestly indicate which **one** in each **row** is the best fit for your organization.

Check one box in each *horizontal row*:

How would your organization prefer a PFF intern to concentrate his/her attention?

☐ likes variety, action	OR	☐ likes quiet for concentration
☐ likes to have people around	OR	☐ may prefer to be alone
☐ enjoys many different relationships	OR	☐ needs few close relationships
☐ energized by what goes on in the outside world	OR	☐ energized by what goes on in the inner world
☐ often acts quickly	OR	☐ prefers to think before acting
☐ needs to experience world to understand it	OR	☐ likes to understand the world before experiencing it

Information about students and sponsors obtained, PFF moves on to the actual matching process. "Every situation isn't going to be perfect," Richardson acknowledged. "But we want to do the best that we can to set our students and our business partners up for success." PFF staff match students and company cultures using the Jungian typologies to obtain the best fit in terms of temperament, skills, interests, and personality. After making an initial match, students attend interview days where sponsors interview twice the number of students for which they have positions. Interviews last 15 to 20 minutes and allow companies to feel confident about having met the students they will hire. Companies rank their top candidates, and then PFF determines placements. "We always want a student who wants that position and that position who wants that student," Richardson explained. "It doesn't always happen, and that's okay."

PFF then trains the students for their summer internships and, perhaps more importantly, also trains the sponsors to accept them. "We can't take for granted that [the businesses] know how to work with our students," Richardson said. Sponsors receive an annually updated handbook that provides everything they need to know about the logistics of the internship they are about to provide. It includes information on, for example, important calendar dates and ideas for filling students' downtime. PFF urges every business sponsor to provide a supervisor, mentor, and coordinator to students. The coordinator manages all the PFF interns at a given site (having a single point of contact is important when a site can have upward of 10 interns). The supervisor, mentor, and coordinator roles have job descriptions in the business sponsor's handbook, which also provides advice for interacting with students (e.g., be sure to have a desk and a computer for them, take them to lunch on their first day). Beyond this concrete information, the handbook also touches on difficulties "navigating the intergenerational nature of the modern American workplace." PFF staff sit down with the business partners to discuss how to get to know and work with students, and they conduct a diversity training. Business partners also interact with each other and discuss their experiences via roundtables that PFF conducts.

To kick off the summer internship season, PFF hosts a "meet-and-greet" where representatives from the businesses meet students and their families and the "big reveal" indicates where students are placed. This builds excitement and connection around the internship process. Once the internships begin, PFF's staff conduct bi-weekly site visits and stay in touch with business partners through constant email reminders, interim evaluations, and questions about how the experience is going. If students or businesses have a concern during the summer, they can contact the hotline PFF sets up as a centralized location for call-outs, problems, questions, and other concerns. For students under age 18, PFF keeps parental releases and work permits and IDs on file and can send these to the business that request them. Keeping track of the details in this way makes for a smoother internship process overall.

As the summer concludes and students prepare to go back to school, PFF conducts an evaluation with the business partners. Businesses rate students on a number of different characteristics, and PFF examines the evaluations for outliers or concerns. "We never want to lose a sponsor because of something in the evaluation," Richardson noted. The evaluations are also used for new program areas. For example, when students were not demonstrating gratitude for their internships, PFF implemented a new program, "Attitudes for Gratitude." PFF staff then follow up with business sponsors to talk about their feedback and show they are responding. Because students return to the same business for three consecutive summers, the evaluation also includes information on how to continue from summer to summer and asks if the business would like to retain the student.

Richardon's presentation on the great work Partnership for the Future conducts focused on managing the work of an internship program, but the level of detail and thoughtfulness is instructive for programs moving into new processes and practices, career success-related or otherwise. A comprehensive plan that maps out both the broad strokes of process and the finer details makes everything run much smoother for all stakeholders involved. For internship programs, with many moving parts and people, this is especially true.

Key takeaways from Richardson's presentation include:

1. Know your students and your business partners. Collect information on their interests, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. This data will improve your matching.
2. Help business partners/sponsors learn how to work with students. Invest time in creating resources (e.g., a manual) that informs businesses about how to make the work experience positive. Do not be afraid to be prescriptive and describe in detail how the work experience should go for your students.
3. Be sure to think about how your organization is evaluating its work. Ask for feedback from partners and students and use that data to inform and improve how your program functions.

Preparing Your Advisors

Change and expansion are seldom easy for programs. Inertia is a powerful force toward extant programs, practices, and procedures. Because of this, staff buy-in and feedback are critical during times of program expansion or change. Students Rising Above (SRA), a college completion and workforce development program in San Francisco, discovered ways to obtain the buy-in of frontline staff and make the expansion into providing career success services easier. Prior to implementing career success services, SRA saw students obtaining jobs that did not require a college degree, a concerning fact given the time and resources the program expends on students achieving that goal. After SRA integrated career development programming into existing work, 85 percent of its students are now taking career ladder jobs within 12 months of graduation. Vanessa Barbic, SRA's Associate Director of Online Programs, discussed the tools she helped to develop that make advisors' jobs easier and their services to students more effective.

A culture of clear expectations helps advisors become comfortable with the idea of career development programming. SRA's organizational priorities in this area are clearly established. Advisors know exactly which skills and capacities students will be learning (e.g. resume and cover letter development, thank-you letter writing, networking). Barbic noted that most of SRA's staff have no background in career services or development. To begin implementing change, she recommended drawing upon staff members who are willing and want to participate. She recommended identifying one person to be the career development point person or manager to get things up and running.

After identifying students' needs, either by observing their outcomes or surveying them directly, a program can begin training staff on basic elements of career development. SRA employs a train-the-trainer model. A single person cannot personally have conversations with 500 students about interviews, but a single person can train other staff. When additional staff can provide career development services in small ways like talking to students about cover letters or platforms for career exploration, it makes it a lot easier to scale a program. "Many hands make light work," as the saying goes.

The career development program at SRA involves a three-pronged approach: in-person workshops, one-on-one coaching, and leveraging technology like online services and resources. Students are required to participate in one in-person workshop every year during the five years in which they participate in the SRA program. The workshops cover topics like resume writing, interview preparation and networking, and are targeted toward students' current year in high school or college. SRA also hosts career insight events, which are opportunities for students to visit work sites across fields and industries, where they network with employees and get a feel for both the workplace and the work.

To help advisors effectively deliver both the career development program and college access services, SRA examined how to streamline the in-person supports students received. This happens in a few ways. First, an emphasis on group supports (versus one-on-one supports) creates efficiencies for advisors. SRA can set a knowledge foundation with multiple students at once via a group training (either in-person or via webinar) that introduces or reinforces lessons through a career development curriculum.

Students can learn from each other's questions and comments and advisors can get a sense of how students received the lesson. From there, advisors can troubleshoot the needs and more complex questions of individual students in a one-on-one context.

Members of the community are also involved with SRA's career development programming. These volunteers contribute to the career development program by participating in workshops, coaching students about how to interview professionally and to network, and working at and helping to plan career fairs. Additionally, volunteers take their own turn in group settings with students during on-site career insight days where students can learn more about a given profession and ask questions. Community members also help students one-on-one by reviewing resumes (only a select cadre of volunteers, typically human resources professionals, dispense career advice) and serving as mentors to individual students. Community volunteers are also an excellent source of internship placements (as are board members). This was a common theme both at NCAN's pre-conference training and other career success sessions at the conference; volunteers and board members are a rich source of internship opportunities and placements for students, either directly or by connecting an organization with new contacts.

The third prong of SRA's career development programming involves leveraging technology. Barbic and her team have developed a centralized resource library, accessible by students and staff, that includes quick tips and straightforward how-to articles like how to write a resume, cover letter, or interview thank-you note, or where to look for positions. This provides an immense knowledge base that answers many of students' frequently asked questions. Students are taught to try to seek the answers to questions themselves first through the Students Rising Above Hub. Before creating the Hub, SRA had a career development website using a free web service. The Hub itself was developed using Salesforce and includes information on college access and persistence, financial aid, life skills, and career development. Using this resource is a boon to advisors, who can deliver information more efficiently and consistently to students.

The Hub is not used just for articles and blog posts. It also includes recorded videos with specific elements of the career development curriculum and associated quizzes that measure whether students have absorbed key content. This gives advisors a clear metric about students' successes and struggles around career development that is more straightforward and quicker to attain than through one-on-one counseling.

The other way SRA leverages technology is by employing live webinars whenever possible. Barbic noted that these build support across students, alums, and community members and provide "limitless options" for group mentoring and Q&A. She noted that SRA staff prefer webinars over in-person workshops. Students can access webinars wherever they are, and the webinars scale to accommodate as many students as are interested; there is no need to find a suitable space for an in-person gathering. The webinars average 30 minutes in length, sometimes fewer, and students can ask questions in real time. When advisors notice students asking the same kinds of questions at various points throughout the year, they can host a group webinar to answer them all at once. Additionally, advisors appreciate webinars as a supplement to

reinforcing concepts and training them on new concepts; beyond just educating students, they are also useful for staff professional development.

Key takeaways from Barbic's presentation include:

1. Make the case with data to staff and stakeholders for the need for new services. How does your organization know that students need these services?
2. Allow, and seek out, advisors' feedback (and, in turn, give them feedback) on the new services that they are being asked to provide. Establish clear roles and expectations early and discuss these with staff.
3. A set of well-developed and thoughtful resources never hurts, but be creative in thinking about how you can provide these without a lot of financial investment (e,g., the free website described above).

For more on SRA's work in this area, consult its [resume](#) and [career exploration](#) toolkits.

Buy-In from Business Partners

A key feature and benefit of expanding into the career success arena is the opportunity to partner with businesses and industries to provide meaningful professional opportunities for students. Starting and building those connections is more easily said than done. An NCAN member with particular expertise in this area is Genesys Works (GW), which operates in Houston, the Bay Area, Chicago, the D.C. metro area, and the Twin Cities. Teanna Dorsey, Alumni Program Manager at Genesys Works Houston, addressed NCAN conference attendees about her organization's comprehensive strategy for recruiting business partners.

Genesys Works provides high school students with substantive skills training in workplace-relevant fields like information technology, accounting-business, and engineering, and places them into meaningful, yearlong professional opportunities that pay a competitive wage. Additionally, GW provides traditional college and career coaching with which most college access programs would be familiar, and provides program alumni with success supports to help them navigate postsecondary barriers. GW served nearly 3,000 students in 2016, and a recent economic analysis found that every dollar invested in the program provides a return of $13.45.

Partner *identification* is the first step in the process of procuring business buy-in. Genesys Works Houston currently partners with 60 major corporations, including 46 percent of the Fortune 500 companies and 26 percent of the largest private employers headquartered in the Houston area. Dorsey identified three avenues for approaching the corporate sector:

- **Local networking organizations** (e.g., local chambers of commerce)

- **Strategic board development** – Tapping the connections and networks of board members who may be able to secure business relationships or internship placements with new partners
- **Local business collaboratives** (e.g., the Greater Houston Partnership) – This may be similar to local networking organizations or chambers of commerce, but may be more expansive and have specific initiatives. For example, the Greater Houston Partnership operates UpSkill Houston, which "seeks to increase the number of area citizens trained for rewarding careers in seven sectors critical to the region's economy." Initiatives like these are particularly relevant for career success programming.

Beyond these three, Dorsey emphasized the importance of word of mouth and warm introductions from current partners for identifying and making inroads with new ones. There is a lot of value in developing your professional network to leverage satisfied customers as champions for growth within new companies, she suggested.

After identifying partners to approach, Dorsey recommended developing "a *strategic* and *targeted* ask with a clear value proposition." Genesys Works' website helps to lay out such a proposition, as does the infographic below, which concisely describes the selling points (and expectations) for a potential business partner. Having testimonials from other business partners (or connecting existing business partners to prospective ones) also reduces the barriers to entry because partners may feel like they are not taking a risk bringing on a student intern from GW Houston.

Figure 3

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE INTERN

(L) Mark Boring, IT Director, Kinder Morgan
(R) Edgar Alanis, Class of 2015

SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED the Genesys Works core program

Minimum 1 year of **WORK EXPERIENCE** in corporate America

LOGISTICS
> Client can choose contract length
> Client can choose the working Alumni

ATTENDING COLLEGE locally or returning for the summer

FLEXIBLE working hours

COMMITMENT FROM CLIENT

Minimum 1 semester commitment at 20 hours/week > Provide meaningful work > Appointed Supervisor

SUPPORT FOR SUPERVISOR

New Supervisor Training

Alumni Program Coordinator to conduct regular check-in meetings and performance reviews

IMPACT

Corporations no longer have to decide between doing what's best for their bottom line and what's good for the community. Genesys Works' young professionals do real work in meaningful internships, cost-effectively. Genesys Works is redefining the student internship model and developing a robust pipeline of diverse talent capable of driving the economic success of our business community for years to come.

The benefits GW Houston describes in recruiting business partners cover several different angles. These include professional development opportunities for managers and staff, investing in the local community, developing a pipeline of diverse and skilled talent, and filling workplace needs at a low cost. GW Houston staff also work hard to understand businesses' intern demands, so they surveyed these businesses to determine when companies hire interns and for how long. Just 9 percent of businesses surveyed have full-year internships, which means GW Houston has to make a more convincing case for why a student should be placed with the business for 20 hours a week for the full year.

The value proposition to businesses also emphasizes the extensive skills with which students come into the workplace after eight weeks of technical training. The chart below shows the duties students can fulfill at a workplace through business, engineering, or information technology capacities.

[Figure 4](#)

Typical job duties:

Business	Engineering	Information Technology
General business and accounting tasks	Create and manipulate objects utilizing AutoCAD	Help desk support
Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable	Create and manage layouts, viewports, and page setups	System refreshes, migrations, imaging, and core loads
Assistance with financial statements	Survey building architectural properties	Software installation
Basic payroll functions	Create as-built drawings	Hardware upgrades
Account analysis	Plot projects or alignment sheets for approval	Computer deployment and setup
Support in basic Human Resources	Sort drawings	General PC and network troubleshooting
Marketing duties	Redraw diagrams to new industry standards	Cable making and cable pulls
Supply Chain tasks	Add missing or new pipe lines to pipeline schematics	Ticket tracking and resolution
Basic problem solving	Utilize geographic information systems (GIS) to help manage pipelines	Updating corporate IT database information
MS Office Suite: Excel, Word, PowerPoint, Outlook	Assist engineers on projects	Manage computer and equipment inventory control

Key takeaways from Dorsey's presentation include:

1. GW Houston gives businesses multiple reasons to say "yes" to becoming a partner. Its approach both to partner identification and recruitment is multi-pronged. GW Houston uses its participation in many community groups to find new businesses at which students can be placed, and then leverages connections (alumni, board members, other businesses) to bring these new businesses on as partners.
2. The evidence of GW Houston's program impact on students, businesses, and the community, its strong connections with more than two dozen high schools across the Houston area, and the extensive training it provides to students make for an

attractive value proposition to businesses. Wherever possible, organizations should try to think about whether their selling points include a number of different angles.

3. The materials and website through which GW Houston shares information are attractively designed, concise, and approachable; that kind of investment makes a difference in recruiting.

Other NCAN member organizations seeking business partners for career success program expansion can find many replicable steps from both Genesys Works and (as described above) Partnership for the Future's approaches.

Conclusion

In just a few hours at the 2017 NCAN National Conference, these speakers tackled four key aspects of career success programming. They focused on the specific thought processes and approaches that have made their programs successful as they moved into and then expanded their work in the career success field. NCAN members should consider these four organizations' work in this area as good role models and guideposts for connecting college and career success for students and leading them to postsecondary completion with a purpose.

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