

By C. Deanna Lewis

Building A Partnership With Industry: One Step At A Time

**ESTABLISHING
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HAVE YOU TRIED TO INITIATE A PARTNERSHIP

that abruptly ended following a series of starts and subsequent stops? Have you had a great idea that everyone loves but it never gets past the “talking” stage? Perhaps industry professionals and educators are on board and there is just the right mix of community leaders. There may even be a Memorandum of Understanding in place. Ideally, it appears to be the perfect partnership. But, somehow, you just can’t make the pieces fit. Sometimes it takes building the partnership initiative one distinct step at a time. The Home Builders Institute, with a 35-year history in workforce development, is dedicated to finding innovative strategies to maximize the number of youth exposed to and knowledgeable about all aspects of the residential construction industry.

We know from experience that partnerships combining industry, education and community entities are an excellent means of meeting our goal of engaging a greater number of youth in the 100-plus occupations required to construct a home. There is something for all students—occupations ranging from the trades, technical, creative, administrative to managerial positions. Establishing partnerships is a fundamental component in creating a connection between industry professionals, educators and community leaders. The partnership approach is two-fold: to blend classroom instruction with hands-on experience, and to prepare youth for life experiences whether entering the workforce following high school or a two- or four-year postsecondary institution. It’s all

about finding ways to make it happen for students. To get started on your initiative, don’t overlook the obvious: put that task force in place to get under way.

Oh No, Not Another Task Force!

Yes, it’s time to pull out the task force concept as a means of getting started. The purpose of convening this select group is three-fold; they will explore, assess and recommend. These are three initial steps necessary to determine what type of activity is best suited for the partnership. It is important to complete the work of the task force within an identified length of time. Include representation from all partners, but keep the group small. Be realistic about expectations and results!

Explore

Exploring options requires defining the available types of activities, staff considerations, facility requirements and funding resources to execute the activity. Time to brainstorm! List every conceivable idea—think big, medium and small. Here are some ideas to get the list started: an academy, student internships, teacher externships, industry-related student organization, work-based mentoring, service-learning, speakers bureau, classroom visitations and career days. Plus, some questions to keep you going: Is your group looking for a program that is ongoing, (e.g., an academy) or a project that is repeated annually (e.g., career day)? Do you need full-time staff or can the project be completed with the use of volunteers? Is building lab space part of your program or will the activity use an existing facility? And that overarching question—who pays?

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Assess

Assessing the needs of an activity is critical. Frequently the question is asked, “why a needs assessment?” And it is usually followed by the statement, “we know the problem!” The needs assessment is a process that can be used to determine what is missing between what currently exists and what is needed. It defines information such as the climate of the community, current educational offerings, and the focus for planning an initiative that is appropriate for the target audience. The needs assessment format can vary. The most popular means of conducting the assessment is via a survey. You may also collect and analyze specific data related to the initiative, and/or develop

questions for use with individual interviews or focus groups. When the assessment is complete it should be evident that there is a need for the proposed activity; there is a committed group of partners; and there is a partnership commitment for sufficient time and effort to plan, design, develop and initiate the proposed initiative. Commitment is vital. Be sure to ask these questions: Does the partnership support the assessment findings? Are they willing to supply ample staff, secure necessary funds and engage a sufficient number of volunteers?

Recommend

Recommending next steps is the final phase of the task force. Based on the work

accomplished in steps one and two, the task force is ready to identify the specific need(s) to be addressed, and the target population; provide a short list of appropriate activities with rationale for each; suggest potential funding sources for each activity listed; secure a key contact person to represent each partner; and suggest a date to have the planning team in place and functioning. After recommendations are completed and presented to the entire partnership, disband the task force. It’s a job well done! It’s also a pleasant surprise when your task force members volunteer to continue with the planning phase of the initiative.



Now Make the Pieces Fit

First, the partnership group should find a champion to head the planning team. Select carefully! This individual will head the team that will plan, develop and implement the partnership initiative. Based on the task force recommendations it should not be difficult to assemble the team. Once accomplished, have a session for team members to define the team's goals, objectives and outcomes. Put it in writing and plan, plan, plan!

Easy steps for filling in the written plan for the initiative:

- Start with the goal.
- Add objectives appropriate for supporting the goal.
- Establish evaluation criteria for the objectives.
- Provide a strategy to meet the objectives.

- Outline tasks with an action plan to accomplish each strategy.
- Assign the responsibility of each task to team members (and others as appropriate).
- Produce deliverable(s) that support the goal and objectives.

The budget is an integral part of the planning process. Here are some preparation tips:

- List all conceivable expenditures with an anticipated cost.
- Identify which areas are potential candidates for volunteer or in-kind support.
- Identify any confirmed funding and where it might be utilized in the budget.
- Identify funding prospects with projected request amounts.
- Use a budget worksheet. The

worksheet makes it easier to manage the initiative and align projected expenditures with activity.

Launching a new partnership initiative that connects industry to education to community is challenging, exciting and fun! **I**

Home Builders Institute is Cluster Leader for the Architecture and Construction Career Cluster. The cluster provides an organizing tool for schools, small learning communities, academies and magnet schools. Partnerships involve states, schools, educators, employers, industry groups and other stakeholders working together to create curriculum guidelines, academic and technical standards, assessments, and professional development materials for the career cluster.