# COLLEGE
# &CAREER FAIR
# TOOLKIT

Association for Career
and Technical Education
**ACTE**®

**WBL**
WORK-BASED LEARNING

## AUTHOR

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ACTE Work-Based Learning is a community of professionals who are working to provide students with authentic learning experiences in business and industry and include educators, counselors, and school-to-work/work-based learning coordinators. Learn more at **www.acteonline.org/work-based-learning-section**

## PURPOSE

This toolkit is designed to help schools implement a College & Career fair in a high school setting. The first section provides an overview of the target school and event. The remainder is designed as a planning tool for individuals and schools who are interested in planning their own College and Career fair. The resources embedded throughout this toolkit were created by a committee of staff members from the Arlington Career Center (ACC) in Arlington, Virginia. Please feel free to adapt and use these materials as you see fit.

## SETTING

The Arlington Career Center (ACC) is the Career and Technical Education (CTE) center for Arlington Public Schools (Arlington, VA) and also serves students through full-time academic programs. Students who attend their neighborhood high school can attend ACC for CTE classes and are typically bussed in between the schools during their school day. Students who attend ACC for the full day receive their core academic content through one of four programs:

- **The Academic Academy**
  - Serves students who need additional social-emotional supports and who benefit from a smaller class size
  - Students are referred by a counselor at their neighborhood school to participate in this program

- **Arlington Tech**
  - A STEM-focused high school program with a Project-Based Learning instructional model. Students start taking CTE in the freshman year and have the option to take dual-enrolled courses with our local community college in their junior and senior years (core content and CTE options).
  - Students apply via a lottery system in their 8th or 9th-grade years. There is a limit of 150 spots per freshman class.

- **The English Learner Institute**
  - Serves newly arrived students who are learning English as a second language
  - Many students have interrupted or limited schooling in their home countries
  - Students are referred by a counselor at their neighborhood school

- **The Program for Employment Preparedness**
  - A transition education program that serves students with mild to moderate disabilities who receive special education services
  - Students participate in internships (both school-based and site-based) three days per week. Some students report directly to a supervisor at a job site, while others travel to and from sites in small groups with staff supervision.
  - Students are referred by the Transition Coordinator at their neighborhood school, typically after they have completed all (or most) of their credits needed for their high school diploma.

Students from each of the full-time programs are also able to enroll in CTE classes, and we consider CTE to be the heart of our school. The combined enrollment at ACC is 1,103 students.

# AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACC COLLEGE & CAREER FAIR

The ACC College & Career fair is a one-day, full-day event during which college admission counselors and individuals representing local businesses, non-profits, military branches, and trade unions are invited into our building to meet with students. The purposes of the event are:

1. For students to learn about careers and vocations from actual professionals in the field
2. To connect students to possible pathways to careers through post-secondary experiences such as college, apprenticeships, or employment
3. For employers to connect with potential candidates

To accomplish these goals, we divide the event into three sections:

## Information Fair

**An opportunity for students to meet with the participants:**

- Looks like a typical information fair or job fair
- Tables are set up in common areas and are grouped by theme (i.e., trades and unions together)
- Placards are provided to business partners to indicate who they are
- Each CTE class visits for 30 minutes based on a schedule
- Students are provided a note-taking sheet to fill out as they meet people

## Hands-on Help

**An opportunity for students to get one-on-one help from volunteers to:**

- Edit their resumes
- Practice interview skills
- Fill out job applications they might have picked up during the fair
- This is an optional 30-minute station for students during their assigned CTE class

## Learning Opportunities

**A chance for volunteers to provide instruction on topics related to College & Career, including:**

- Youth Registered Apprenticeships and Registered Apprenticeships
- How to complete the FAFSA application
- Financial literacy tips
- This is an optional 30-minute station for students during their assigned CTE class

Students participate in the fair during one of their CTE class periods (more information on how to plan this is provided later in this toolkit). Our instructional periods are 90 minutes, and we divide that time on the day of the fair as follows:

- 30 minutes - students circulate the information fair with their CTE teacher
- 30 minutes - students transition to the hands-on help OR learning opportunities sessions (some students might be assigned one or the other, depending on their needs)
- 30 minutes - students and CTE teacher return to their classroom to recap and reflect on the event

Business partners are invited to attend morning, afternoon, or full-day sessions. On the day of the event, we build time into our schedule for the setup and breakdown of tables, and for participants to set out their materials. Breakfast is provided for participants in the morning, and lunch is provided for those who stay for the full day. More information on recruitment is provided later in this toolkit.

This event requires intensive planning and preparation and is also a big ask of our CTE teachers; therefore, ACC historically hosts the College & Career Fair once every two years. This supplements an annual county-wide College fair and annual Teen Job Expo, as well as other local events.

The fair is coordinated by a school-based staff committee. The committee typically meets once per month during the year that the event is scheduled to take place. The members of the ACC College & Career Fair have included:

- School Counselors
- CTE Department Chair / CTE Teachers
- Transition Coordinator
- Work-Based Learning Coordinator
- Special Education Resource Teachers
- Equity & Excellence Coordinator

# PICTURES FROM IN-PERSON COLLEGE & CAREER FAIR



Students from the Program for Employment Pre-paredness enjoying the fair. These students helped make boxed lunches for all of the participants as a part of our in-school Brown Box Lunch program.



A student meets with a representative from George Mason University to find out more about their school.



Students talk with a local recruiter from the Marine Corps.



A former Physical Therapy and EMT student posing with other Arlington County Fire Depart-ment and EMS staff.



Tables set up in our Commons for the infor-mation fair portion of the event.



Students learn more about careers in the Arlington Fire Department.

# PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR COLLEGE & CAREER FAIR

This document is a guide for individuals and/or schools who are interested in getting a College & Career fair planned. Topics covered include:

- Building buy-in for your event

- Selecting your planning committee

- A suggested timeline for planning

- Recruiting and communicating with business partners

- Helping prepare your business partners and students for the event

- Reflecting on your event

# *BUILDING BUY-IN AT YOUR SCHOOL*

For this event to succeed, you need the buy-in of your staff and students. A full-day event that will impact teaching time and that will divert resources should be planned for accordingly. WBL Coordinators (or teams) who are interested in putting an event like this together for the first time should meet with their school administrators and department chairs first to gauge interest. Remind these key stakeholders that real-world experiences can help students make connections between the academic and technical skills they are learning in school and post-school pathways. Once there is buy-in from these individuals, you can start to discuss this event with your whole staff.

At ACC, we have treated the College & Career fair as a CTE department event. Because the majority of our full-time students take a CTE class, this is one way that we ensure that students are not pulled out of multiple content area classes on the day of the event. At the beginning of the year that the fair will take place, our CTE department chair has the group identify monthly instructional activities that will help prepare students for the fair in the spring. These typically align with the workplace readiness skills and competencies that CTE teachers are expected to teach in their courses already. Here are some examples of themes by month (aligned with the calendar in the table below):

- **October:** elevator pitch about yourself or your CTE class
- **November:** Resumes / Professionalism
- **December / January:** Professionalism / Interviewing practice
- **February:** CTE Month Agenda / help students focus on the previous months to enhance what they have already learned or need assistance with
- **March:** Prep students to meet with industry partners.
- **April:** Career and College fair event
- **May:** After Action Report/ Did we meet our goal?

After each month, the CTE department chair dedicates 10-15 minutes at the monthly CTE meeting to review how teachers covered these themes. It is important to set this expectation for staff so that students receive consistent preparation for this event. This also allows opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share ideas for how to best target these topics.

There are many resources available to staff who are interested in taking a similar approach to preparing students for a College & Career fair. ACTE has partnered with Accenture to provide free access for CTE educators to the Skills 2 Succeed Academy. This online series of videos and supporting materials are a fantastic way to help prepare students to choose a career, get a job, and find success in the workplace.

# SELECTING YOUR PLANNING COMMITTEE

Use this planning template to brainstorm possible members of your planning committee.

| Role in school | Name of individual | Perspectives and resources they would bring to the committee |
|---|---|---|
| School Counselor | | |
| CTE department chair or CTE teacher | | |
| Content area department chair or teacher | | |
| Transition coordinator | | |
| Work-Based Learning coordinator | | |
| Special Education teacher | | |
| Equity and Excellence coordinator (might be called Diversity & Inclusion) | | |
| Volunteer or Partnerships liaison | | |

# *SUGGESTED TIMELINE*

Below is a sample calendar of meeting topics and/or targets for the planning committee by month.

| August/September | October | November |
|---|---|---|
| • Solicit membership for the staff planning committee<br><br>• Assign roles | • Select date for the event and get approval from your admin team<br><br>• Draft marketing materials for your event | • Finalize marketing materials (get approval if needed) to send to potential partners<br><br>• Ask the admin team for a spot on the agenda at your December staff meeting |

| December | January | February |
|---|---|---|
| • Share plans for the event at your staff meeting<br><br>• Distribute suggested email / letter to teachers and ask for their help with soliciting partners for the event | • Identify spaces and other logistical needs for the event:<br>  · Where will your tables be set up?<br>  · Will breakfast or lunch be provided for participants?<br>  · What additional spaces or resources might be needed on the day of the event?<br><br>• Check on the list of registered participants | • Send a reminder email to staff to share and recruit participants<br><br>• Create documents for students to use during the event |

| March | April | May/June |
|---|---|---|
| • Confirm participation with all registered individuals<br><br>• Finalize plans for setup with admin and necessary building staff<br><br>• Share student paperwork with homeroom teachers | • Host College & Career Expo (we typically aim for the first week or two in April, depending on when our Spring Break occurs that year)<br><br>• Request feedback from students, partners, and staff on the event | • Review feedback from students and partners<br><br>• Take notes on ideas for the next event<br><br>• Ensure that copies of all event materials are saved and shared for future use |

# RECRUITING AND COMMUNICATING WITH BUSINESS PARTNERS

Aside from staff buy-in, the most important part of the College & Career Expo is the recruitment of partners from colleges and businesses that are relevant to your students.

When starting your recruitment process, you should first assess existing connections between your school and your school's community. Use these questions to guide your thinking:

- What existing relationships do staff in your building have with community members?
  · These might include: former or regular guest speakers, subject matter experts in that staff member's field, former staff who might now work industry, former co-workers (if the staff has come from an industry setting)

- What parent organizations exist in your building, and how might they help in promoting this event and/or recruiting participants?
  · Your PTA or even individual parents might be able to help with networking and outreach

- What structures exist on a school or district level to help staff reach out to people in your community?
  · Many schools fund a Volunteer Coordinator or Liaison position - ask that individual where they would start
  · Your school district should have a communications office, and individuals there might also be able to help you.

As the CTE center for our district, the ACC committee works closely with our CTE teachers to leverage the existing relationships that they have with members of the community.
We advertise the event on our school Twitter account (@APSCareerCenter) and on our school's website. Additionally, we share details of the event with the following individuals and organizations and ask for their help in sharing our promotional materials with their contacts:

- Our district's School and Community Relations office
- Our district-level CTE staff
- Our district's Adult, Career and Technical Education Advisory committee
- Local School Board and County Board members
- The Arlington Chamber of Commerce

Here are several samples of marketing materials that we share with these individuals:

- Sample flyer
- Sample letter to send to businesses
- Sample letter and email to share with colleagues

Once we have identified interested participants, we have them complete a Google form to register:

- Sample Google Form for registration

Contact information is then tracked using a Google spreadsheet. There are tabs to keep track of which businesses have been reached, and which have been confirmed. Additionally, we keep a tab (updated annually) dedicated to tracking known contacts at businesses throughout the community:

- Suggested spreadsheet for keeping track of outreach and registration.

Effective recruitment requires regular communication with school staff. Regular emails and recurring plugs at staff meetings have been the most successful tools for getting staff to help in recruitment efforts.

# PREPARING BUSINESS PARTNERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND STUDENTS

## For Business Partners & Volunteers

As business partners and volunteers sign up for your event, designate a member of your committee to keep track of and communicate with these individuals. Be sure to send a confirmation email upon receipt of their registration. As a committee, develop a brief overview of your event and include pictures of your building, if possible. Follow up with additional instructions at least one month before your event.

Additional questions to consider before sending your reminder email one month prior to the event:

• Does your school or district require that all volunteers go through a screening process? If so, send this information to your business partners after they register for the event
• Do any of your business partners need access to additional technology or outlets?
• Is there parking or other transportation considerations that business partners should be aware of?
• Will you provide food for the business partners? If so, will you ask for their preferences in advance of the event?
• How will business partners enter your building? Where will they go once they are inside? Who should they look for on the day of the event?
• Do you want to provide an emergency contact number for any day of issues?

## For Students

As discussed above in the section on buy-in, it is important that students understand the purpose of the College & Career fair. You should develop a plan for how and when students and families will be made aware of the event. If you are expecting staff to incorporate the College & Career fair into their teaching, consider developing and providing mini-lessons or materials for them. The week of the event, add reminders to your daily announcements and any school social media accounts to remind students and parents of the event and any expectations you have for them during the event (ex. Dress professionally and/or bring a copy of your resume).

For the day of the event, provide physical materials or digital tools to help students organize the information that they learn. An example can be found here. Consider what additional scaffolds and supports might benefit students with disabilities or students who are English language learners. At past events, we have employed the following strategies for these groups:

• For all students: create multiple versions of the note taking sheet for different reading or writing proficiency levels; include additional sentence frames, visual supports, and/or word banks, as needed
• For students with disabilities: consider pairing staff with individual or small groups of students to model and assist with navigating the information fair
• For English learners: consider pairing staff or other volunteers who are fluent in the student's primary spoken language with the student during the event to model and assist with navigating the information fair

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# *DAY OF EVENT, REFLECTION, & FOLLOW-UP*

On the day of the event, make sure to document your successes with pictures. Consider designating a member of your planning committee as the event photographer. If you have a digital photography class or program in your building, ask for student volunteers! APS encourages staff to use Twitter, so we typically post photos through our school and personal accounts and tag our business partner participants in our posts.

If you are fortunate enough to have School Board or County Board members attend your event, make sure to take note of their attendance and find time to say hello (and remember to send a thank-you note after the event).

After the event is over, plan for how you will get feedback from your business partners, student participants, and staff. At ACC, we have a student support period every day (similar to a homeroom) and we ask teachers in those classes to share a survey form with students. We include a link to a similar form for business partners when we send out thank-you notes. Staff can also provide valuable feedback. Consider asking your administrative team for a few minutes at the staff meeting after your event to share a survey with staff.

Below are sample Google forms that you might use with each of these groups:

- Sample form for collecting feedback from business partners
- Sample form for collecting feedback from students
- Sample form for collecting feedback from staff

Make sure that your students, staff, and community see the benefits of your College and Career fair. Past versions of our event have helped students get part-time and full-time jobs, learn about career pathways, make connections between CTE classes and careers, find out about and apply to 2- and 4-year colleges, apply for youth-registered apprenticeships, and more. Use your feedback forms and any other anecdotal measures to collect information on the impact your event had on students.

Highlight and celebrate these accomplishments in a public format. In addition to using whatever platforms your school typically uses for publicity, consider asking for time on the agenda at your School Board's next meeting. If possible, ask for a student and staff volunteer to represent the school at said meeting to share how your event impacted them. You can also send a summary of your event to a local newspaper or even a local news channel. Check with your equivalent of the School and Community Relations office to make sure that you follow all district procedures.

Finally, at your last committee meeting of the year, review any constructive criticism that you received through your feedback forms. Consider using a SWOT analysis to organize your thinking. Take time to organize and store any materials that you created or used for your event, and designate a point person to share these resources with committee members during the next school year.