

K-12 Partnership Report

Building a Corporate Education Initiative

A proven approach to planning that accommodates the needs of educators and businesspeople

The best corporate education initiatives don't just happen: they result from careful, deliberate planning in which an organization outlines its goals, identifies the resources it will allocate to reach those goals, and then prepares to achieve them by using its designated resources and the best market information available. One approach to intelligent program planning is presented in this article.

While some businesses have purely philanthropic motives, this article recognizes that most must generate some kind of return on their investment in education outreach. That return can take many forms, including building a stronger workforce pipeline, improving morale and retention of existing employees, building community goodwill or strengthening the company brand. In the end, this focus on returns is beneficial to the education system: it allows for a greater investment in education and encourages a system of accountability (to measure outcomes), two things that are inarguably in the interest of the education market.

Step 1: Identify Your Stakeholders

The best programs start with a sincere desire to help students, and certainly students (along with other members of the education market, including parents, teachers, and administrators) should be kept front and center when thinking about any kind of education outreach program.

Corporate programs driven in whole or in part by a desire for improved stakeholder relations, however, need to consider other audiences at the earliest stages of the planning process. These may include:

- Customers
- Investors/the financial community
- Employees and unions

- Vendors and partners
- Legislators and regulators
- Influencers, including academia and the media

As one example, cable networks tend to focus on three audiences (in addition to education) when establishing their education plans: partners, or the cable operators who distribute their programming to individual markets; legislators and regulators, since cable is a regulated market and such relationships are important to the industry; and the media, since networks want greater visibility to benefit their programming.

Once you have a clear picture of the audiences with whom you'd like to communicate, you've established critical context for the development of a successful program.

Step 2: Conduct an Asset Inventory

It may seem counterintuitive to think about which assets you can incorporate into your program before you've even designed the program. But if you're interested in maximizing your impact on education, you can only do so by using the resources that are most plentiful and available to you, and that will affect program design.

You can start building your asset inventory by asking the following questions:

- What assets have been provided to launch and maintain this campaign? Financial resources, manpower, and partnerships should all be included.
- What does your company produce or provide? What is it respected for? Products or services can be a key component or driver of an effective outreach initiative. This could be air time for broadcasters, hardware for tech companies, etc.
- What strengths does your company have? Do you have strong brand equity, an excellent distribution network, or some other strength that may be considered?
- What intellectual property (copyrights, trademarks, patents, etc.) does your company hold? Can it be used to your advantage?

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- What sort of workforce does your firm employ? Where are employees located, and what are their skill sets? Are there opportunities to institute volunteering programs, or tap into existing programs?
- What relationships do you have that could be utilized here? Do you have strategic partners, sway within trade associations, access to industry experts, or agreements with celebrities or other prominent personalities?
- Which other departments may have resources you can utilize? If responsibility for some of your target audiences falls within the purview of other departments (such as legislators and regulators being of interest to your government relations team), you should consider talking with them to see what they may be willing to contribute to your efforts.
- What channels (online, mass media, etc.) does your company use for marketing and communications? Can you take advantage of existing campaigns to gain exposure using current communications initiatives?

Once you've targeted stakeholder groups and identified available assets, you're ready to define the outcomes you want to see in return for your investment.

Step 3: Define Your Organizational Goals for the Program

The way to ensure a strong and extended commitment to education—in other words, the way to put yourself in a position to make a real and sustained impact on the lives of students and teachers—is to show a clear return on the resources your organization invests. You must therefore identify the benefits your organization wants to realize as a result of its efforts just as you focus on the needs of the education market.

First, consider the communications issues facing your organization. Do you have a hard time finding qualified job applicants? Is your reputation strong in each of your stakeholder communities? Is there a need to strengthen your brand or positioning?

Using these issues as background, take your list of targeted stakeholder groups and for each audience, list the results you'd like to achieve. If employees were one of your stakeholder audiences, you may list "build morale," "help build professional skills," or "increase future pool of applicants." You may also have more specific targets, such as "get company listed as one of the top 100 places to work in America." Make this list for each stakeholder group, and recognize that your goals don't have to flow exclusively from your education program. Being listed as one of the top 100 places to work, for example, won't happen solely as a result of your education efforts – but

those efforts will certainly enhance your bid.

After you've listed goals for each individual stakeholder group, look at the lists together: there will likely be overlap that can form the basis of your primary campaign goals. These may include items like "improve image of the organization," "reinforce brand strengths," or "support launch of new product." Weigh the importance of each goal (whether cross-audience or single audience) and prioritize your list.

And remember: While you may have some specific goals in mind, it's not necessary to quantify your goals at this stage in your planning efforts; that will come later.

Step 4: Analyze the Education Market

The K-12 education market is enormous, with more than 100,000 schools across the country serving close to 50 million students in 13 grade levels while encompassing multiple subject areas. How can you confidently hone in on a targeted audience and build a program around their needs?

You can start by focusing on a more manageable slice of the education market. Consider some or all of the following filters:

- **Organizational objectives**—Knowing which issues you've decided to tackle can help you narrow down your target audience substantially. If you've decided to focus on workforce development issues, you're likely going to work with a middle or high school audience. If employee engagement is a priority, you'll probably want to provide volunteer opportunities to your people—which means that programs must be within driving distance of your employee centers.
- **Available resources**—The types of resources you're willing to contribute through your education outreach efforts may help you narrow down your target audience. Donated products in particular may have a limited audience.
- **Geography**—Which geographic markets does your company serve—do you have a national, regional, or local footprint? Are your employees located across the country, or concentrated in a few major markets? Geographic considerations may help you determine which market areas to focus on.
- **Industry**—Your industry may provide a focus: banks, for example, might naturally focus on financial literacy efforts in schools. Be careful not to reflexively concentrate your efforts in this way, however; many companies have effective programs that are not tied to the industry in which they operate.
- **Brand**—Many things about your brand, such as identity and perceived areas of strength, may lead you to a targeted focus area. Volvo, for example,

a brand defined by the concept of safety, might do well to center on safety (Safety in athletics? Bullying? Online safety?) as a core tenet of their efforts.

Once you've narrowed your potential market to a manageable size, concentrating on a specific geographic region, subject area, and/or set of grade levels, you'll have a more reasonable job ahead of you in terms of market analysis. Now it comes down to good old research skills: taking the time to understand your market segment by reviewing current information and talking to experts in those areas, including association representatives along with administrators and educators in the areas in which you'd like to participate. As you find educators and experts you can rely on, ask for their ongoing advice, and form a council to help guide your planning.

Once you've developed an understanding of your chosen market segment, it's finally time to develop your campaign plan.

Step 5: Design Your Program

You've identified your stakeholder groups, available resources, and organizational goals, and you've identified and learned about the specific segment of the education market you'd like to serve. Now it's time to take all of these pieces and design your outreach program.

At this stage, you're likely not approaching the project as a blank slate: with each step, you've undoubtedly started to connect some dots that will help guide you as you structure your program. You've identified areas of need in your target segment, and had some initial thoughts on how your resources and objectives line up. You can take these concepts for validation to some of

the specialists you spoke with in Step 4, and specifically identify the educational objectives that will form the foundation of your final program design.

From this point on, it's an iterative process, whereby you'll tweak the campaign design and revisit your stakeholder list, asset inventory, and organizational goals as the reality of the program comes into focus. Ultimately you will have optimized all of these campaign components to generate the best results and the most effective use of your resources.

Step 6: Establish an Evaluation Plan

Now that you know what your program will look like, and you've identified goals for both your organization and your education program, you'll need to set a specific definition of success for each objective, determine how that success will be tracked and measured, and establish benchmarks so you have a defined starting point.

For example, if you set a goal of "improved reading abilities" for the 6th graders with whom you're working, you need to identify which facets of reading (enjoyment, comprehension, vocabulary, a composite measurement) you want to measure, identify how they would be measured (standardized test, student survey), what would determine success (a 10% increase in test scores or a boost in enjoyment ratings through a student survey), and where those students are starting out, which would require an assessment or survey to capture initial data.

K-12 Partnership Report

Brett Pawlowski
Editor and Publisher

The *K-12 Partnership Report* is the newsletter of record for anyone involved in connecting schools and their communities, including K-12 partnership practitioners, school foundation directors, and the business and community leaders who work to improve students' lives and help to prepare them for the college and career opportunities that lie ahead. It is published 10 times per year (monthly except June and December) by DeHavilland Associates, 10101 Lampkin Way, Charlotte NC 28269. Phone 704.717.2864; email brett@DeHavillandAssociates.com.

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You should also establish specific criteria and measurements for your corporate objectives; these may come in the form of surveys (employee satisfaction surveys for example), various measurements (\$100,000 in products or billable hours donated, or 2,000 hours volunteered), or other measurements (provided ten employees with leadership opportunities through this program to encourage skill-building).

Establishing measurable objectives and then benchmarking and tracking your results is essential. You'll have data demonstrating that your work is making a difference in the lives of students, which will drive continued support and participation from your education partners. Similarly, you'll be able to clearly demonstrate the value of your campaign internally, which will increase your likelihood of continued (or increased) internal support. And this data can lead to a cycle of continuous improvement, allowing you to regularly improve your efforts and results for all parties.

Step 7: Establish a Communications Plan

The final step in this process is to establish a plan for communicating the merits and results of your campaign with all appropriate stakeholder groups. Establishing a plan for communicating with current company stakeholders should be straightforward: since you have already established channels for reaching these groups, your planning should focus primarily on messaging and delivery format—questions such as audience identification and channels have already been answered.

The education market, however, is a different story, made more complicated by the fact that your communications plan will be dependent on the format and goals of your campaign. (You'll have different goals and use different communication channels when establishing a local volunteer effort versus a national campaign designed to promote a free curriculum, for example.)

With that in mind, here are a few suggestions to

begin your planning process:

- For local outreach and for programs involving volunteers, personal contact with schools and school districts are irreplaceable.
- For national campaigns, direct mail is an effective tool, and the education market has some of the best compiled lists available.
- Partnerships, particularly those with national associations or other organizations, can be very effective both for credibility and message dissemination.
- Online marketing is growing in importance in the education market; however, just like everyone else, teachers strongly dislike unsolicited emails.
- Since every campaign is different, incorporate direct response elements (online registrations, reply cards, etc.) wherever possible so that you can gauge which channels are most effective for you.

By taking a thoughtful and thorough approach to campaign design, you'll ensure not only that you've brought as much to education as you could in as effective a manner as possible, you'll also maximize your opportunities to build goodwill among all stakeholder groups—a move that will likely drive future program continuation and growth, benefiting the education market and your organization.


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City of Austin Mentor and Tutor Program

When district leaders start listing potential partners, the “usual suspects” include businesses, PTA/PTOs, service clubs, chambers of commerce and many others. But how many would list government agencies? It may be time to add them to the list, given the success of a city employee-driven volunteer program in Austin, TX.

Background

The City of Austin Mentor and Tutor Program began in 2002 as a brainstorm between the city manager and the superintendent of schools; they were discussing ways of helping students on state test scores (TAKS), and talked about how they could follow successful volunteering models like those used by the local partners in education group, but with city employees. In April of that year, the Austin City Council passed a resolution authorizing the program, which encouraged City employees to actively participate in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) as mentors and tutors, with a focus on low performing schools.

Because this program allowed city employees to volunteer during work hours, the City Human Resources Department set guidelines for volunteer management and defined the roles and responsibilities of all involved parties. The city allowed employees to volunteer up to two hours each week “on the clock;” these hours were (and are) coded on the employee’s time sheet as MNT time. This coding allowed City Human Resources to calculate the in-kind donation made by the City of Austin.

Development

The program gradually grew over the following few years; then, in 2007, the City Manager met with the AISD Superintendent to discuss expanding the program. During that meeting, they agreed that a recruitment initiative was needed to encourage greater participation, and the City subsequently worked with Austin Partners in Education to administer the program, including providing training and conducting background checks on volunteers. (Individual schools were responsible for establishing their mentor needs and for managing a sign-in procedure that allowed APIE to monitor volunteer participation.)

At that same time, Futrell looked to build internal infrastructure, recruiting Ben Ornelas, a consultant for Austin Energy (a municipally owned electric company), to coordinate city-wide management of the program. Ornelas was selected because he had been overseeing Austin Energy’s participation in the program and had achieved the greatest level of participation among the city’s

39 departments. To further support this program, Futrell also requested that each City department designate at least one employee to act as that department’s volunteer coordinator.

One of Ornelas’ first tasks was to hire an additional full-time employee, Katie Arens, to assist the program; together they designed a plan to promote the program internally to increase participation levels. In the 2007/08 school year, employee participation in the program went from 84 to 382 volunteers, an increase of over 450%.

Then, in 2009, the COA Ethics Office stated that the program needed clear documentation to support the partnership with AISD. Program coordinators created individual Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the district and with each of five nonprofit organizations that have been approved by the district for city volunteers to work through. These MOUs, each signed by the City Manager, laid out clear expectations and commitments from each participating organization.

Structure

The program’s goals - recruiting and preparing volunteers to work with students in high-needs students

Austin Mentor and Tutor Program

Where:

Austin, TX

Organization:

City government

Challenge:

The Austin Independent School District (AISD) was interested in finding volunteer tutors and mentors to support students in higher-need schools in the areas of reading and math.

Solution:

In 2002, the City of Austin created a policy that allowed employees to volunteer within the local schools; it has since added two full-time dedicated staff members and created MOUs with five (soon to be six) community organizations working in strategic areas identified by the district.

Partnership:

The City coordinates with AISD on strategic objectives, working through five community-based partners to prepare and place City employees in schools

Outcomes:

In the last year, 374 employees have participated in the program; other cities, and the state of Texas, are exploring ways if launching similar programs.

in reading and math - have not changed since the beginning. As Ornelas notes, "that focus came from our conversations with the district, and if the district changed its focus we would look for ways that we could align with their goals." The district also provided guidance in selecting the community organizations that volunteers could work through most effectively; those include Austin Partners in Education, Junior Achievement, HOSTS, The Seedling Foundation and Victory Tutorial Program. A sixth, Communities in Schools, is being added for the 2011/12 school year.

In addition to making numerous presentations and other outreach to boost employee participation, Ornelas and Arens take a lead role in coordinating with their community partners, meeting with them regularly to ensure that their work is aligned and to stay current on any changes in strategy each organization may have. They also work to support volunteers by staying in touch with each department's coordinator and following up with volunteers who are facing challenges or those who may need to leave the program.

Volunteers have flexibility in selecting the times and locations that work for them; schools and partners work to make participation as convenient as possible. The length of service varies, but volunteers are asked to commit for at least a year, and the program has recorded

numerous multi-year commitments.

In terms of next steps, Ornelas and Arens are looking at gathering additional feedback through surveys of program participants; they have also begun exploring ways of working with retired employees, including making presentations at their yearly meetings and distributing articles through newsletters sent through the pension office.

Outcomes

The program has been extremely cost-effective, running on a small budget of \$17,000 plus the cost of two full-time staff members; the only cost beyond that is the cost of employees' time during their volunteer work, which came to an additional \$186,737 in the 2011 fiscal year for the time of that year's 374 volunteers.

The innovative nature of the program, combined with its high impact, has been noted by others: Representatives of other cities, and by the state of Texas, have spent time learning about the program and are in some stage of implementing their own versions.

Resource Links

City of Austin Mentor and Tutor Program
www.ci.austin.tx.us/volunteers/

The District-Wide, Curriculum Based Partnership

Partnerships may seem like a "nice to do" but not "necessary to do" activity for schools and community partners - unless you make them directly relevant to each. With the intense focus on test scores and meeting curriculum objectives, it is imperative to schools and districts that we make partnership activities curriculum-based. With the economic challenges, it is important to business and community partners that they spend their time meeting company and organizational objectives. One of the most systematic and systemic approaches is to plan, on a district-wide basis, to make a significant partnership that is curriculum based. I'll share a few examples with you, then identify a few tips to organizing sustainable, curriculum-based events.

Project 1

As in most places, the 5th grade health curriculum included health life saving measures and first aid. We asked ourselves, "Who cares about safety and health care?" For us, there were several answers, including the county Red Cross, insurance companies, the fire department, and the state department of health. The result was that every fifth grader in the city learned Basic First Aid and Emergency tips from professionals in the

field in an all-day, once a year event at the community college. In addition, they learned about potential health care professions. As the cost of bus transportation became more prohibitive, the event changed into a school-site scheduled delivery of the instruction, but was still led by professionals who delivered the instruction. The content fit the curriculum objectives, and also met the objectives of the fire department outreach, American Red Cross training for youth, and insurance companies outreach (safe homes equate to less claims).

Project 2

Third graders were to learn about "community," particularly as it related to the city's history and government. Again we asked, "Who in the community is focused on and cares about this?" The Downtown Business Association, city transportation system, Historic Preservation Society, city/county government office, Mayor's office, and Chamber of Commerce were all identified. After pulling the stakeholders together, there was a downtown walking tour for 3rd graders created that met the curriculum objectives. The Governors office was included as we were in a state capital. The city transportation service was involved as we included

teaching the students about riding public transportation (also a tie in with environmental lessons), and they gave them a free pass for the ride that day. In order to aid with safety a local company donated tops that would make the students easy to identify and keep together. Curriculum/information about the city, the students' city, was written and each student was given a copy to keep. It was extremely successful.

Project 3

At the secondary level, when biotechnology was the cutting edge, we again gathered together the businesses/organizations that would care about making sure our students were kept up to date on science. I contacted one of the local executives of a pharmaceutical testing organization. She in turn invited her colleagues to attend a meeting, using her clout and influence to benefit the schools. There was a tremendous turnout for the meeting, both based on the interest in the topic and the influence of the "inviter." Within a month the educators and interested partners developed the outline for the curriculum, all accessories for the labs were donated, and a series of guest speakers were lined up.

The key steps are to:

1. Identify the educators and curriculum leaders who are interested in connecting with the community and businesses. It takes work, and you want innovative thinkers and doers who are willing to work in a collaborative environment.
2. Articulate the key curriculum objectives that you want to focus on with potential partners.
3. Include key connections to aid the school district team in brainstorming, "what other business or community entities are engaged in or care about this topic?"
4. Ask a key leader in that field to coordinate and invite the representatives of those groups to a meeting to discuss the curriculum objectives, and brainstorm how the community and businesses could help.
5. Clearly articulate the objectives of the curriculum. Differentiate between what could be done and what should be done.
6. If costs are involved, be realistic about what the district should pay for. Budgets are tight. Many businesses, government and community groups have a budget for outreach and education. Partner with them in every way, including outlining a realistic budget to implement the project.
7. Schedule ongoing planning, implementation and evaluation meetings. Document what you are doing. If it is curriculum oriented and sustainable, hopefully it will continue for years to come. The

history will be helpful.

8. Pilot the project in one or two schools or one or two classrooms before you take it to schools across the district. Work out the kinks!
9. Keep all of the grade level or curriculum educators in the loop at some point before everything is all scheduled and done. Likewise, make sure that business and community partners keep their CEOs, HR, and PR departments informed and involved as appropriate. Volunteers can aid in the event if there is organizational buy in.
10. When the event comes to fruition, plan ahead for marketing. There are sensitivities about how partners' names should be listed and logos presented.
11. Make sure to have an evaluation and make adjustments as needed.

If the partnership is curriculum based, it can easily become an annual, sustainable initiative that serves every partner's needs and interests. In my two decades of directing partnerships, I found that the best partnerships were curriculum based, and focused on the business of the schools and the business of the partners.

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