

WORK-BASED LEARNING PLAYBOOK

WHY READ THIS?

The short answer: It can make your business or non-profit more successful and profitable.

This playbook can also make your life easier if you are the one responsible for making sure your organization has a steady stream of talented employees. And that's true whether you run a small business, a large corporation, or something in between. Whether you fix things with your hands, build things, are in tech, healthcare, agriculture, tourism, or run a non-profit.

However you look at it, if you are running a business of any kind, you need talent—and it is often hard to come by. This easy to read playbook will give you the information and resources you need to take advantage of work-based learning—or improve the activities you already do—so that you have employees with the knowledge, skills, and motivation you desire when you need them. It also has two case studies at the end that show how work-based learning helped businesses achieve results.



GET THE FACTS

If you need more persuading, here are a few compelling facts about work-based learning.

FACT

Right now in Montana there is an “experience gap”—there are a lot of good jobs but not enough qualified candidates with the right level of training or credentials.

FACT

Many great jobs do not require traditional educational paths. Work-based learning provides opportunities for businesses to “grow your own” workforce from within.

FACT

Work-based learning can lead to both short-term and long-term increases in productivity.

FACT

Work-based learning leads to high rates of employee retention. Employees who are connected to Montana businesses through work-based learning are more likely to stay in Montana after graduation.

WHAT IS WORK-BASED LEARNING?

Let's be honest, the phrase “work-based learning” is not often used in conversation.

Nor does it stand up and explain to you why it is so important to your business. In fact, the term is so opaque that you might already be doing it—but calling it something else.

Work-based learning, as defined by the State of Montana, is a continuum of activities that engage business and extend the classroom into the workplace, connecting acquired knowledge and skill to a student's future employment. Work-based learning may take place in a workplace, in a school, or the community.

In practice, work-based learning is a catch-all phrase for finding and training employees to thrive in your business in an ever-changing society. So, where do you find them? There is any number of places.

Some of those great employees might be working for you right now, and you simply need to identify them and give them more training. Your future employees, however, might currently be in middle school, high school or college and need to find out about you and what it would take to build a career working with you. This might require some work on your part—visiting schools, working with the principals or teachers, or hosting a work-site tour. It might also include offering apprenticeship and internship programs.

Work-based Learning Experiences

AWARENESS

Career Awareness is a point of entry both for students in Middle School or High School (and possibly earlier) to learn about a potential job or career opportunities. It is also a point of entry for businesses to begin to engage potential employees on a “get-to-know-you basis.” Students gain exposure to an industry and business, and the businesses begin to get a sense of the students.

The activities for this stage can include providing a guest speaker to the schools, field trips, tours of the workplace, and career fairs. These activities can easily help students—and employers—move through the continuum to Exploration.

EXPLORATION

Career Exploration builds on awareness and provides a platform for exploration that familiarizes students with the information, experiences, and pathways for success and to inform career decisions. Typical activities in this level include career research, job shadowing, interviews, and a career interest assessment. These activities take “getting to know you” to a new level where students find out what it is like to work in your field, what makes your industry interesting and

exciting, and why a particular business—yours for instance—is different and has a culture that they find energizing. This helps both students and prospective employers, again, move through the continuum to Preparation.

PREPARATION

Career Preparation transforms interest and exploration into classroom and actual work experience—hands-on knowledge—that help them validate their choices for work and, of greater importance, to help them be successful on the job. It is here that they have direct interaction with professionals in your company and business and often with the community at large. This sets the stage for the final phase of the continuum, Training.

TRAINING

Career Training is where the rubber meets the road, where the combination of classroom learning and on-the-job training result in a candidate who is competitive and, depending on the circumstances, may receive industry-recognized credentials.





HOW DO I START?

It is ideal when both businesses and schools have a commitment to work-based learning and collaborate to create tomorrow's workforce.

It varies from organization to organization and, in some cases, schools rather than businesses may take the lead. It is common for a teacher or school to initiate contact with employers to sound out their interest in some variety of work-based learning activities- a classroom visit, a career fair or a field trip. Businesses, for their part, may also initiate a conversation on the same activities or explore other ways to form or upgrade their pipeline for talented employees.

A strategic approach yields the best approach. Here are some practical steps.

START WITH THE GOAL IN MIND

Map out your current and future needs—and how work-based learning could help you get the workforce you need now or will need in the future.

WHAT WILL HAVE THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON YOUR BUSINESS?

Make an inventory of the skills and competencies you currently have and that you currently need and that you will need in the future. Do you need entry level employees? Something more advanced?

ASK YOURSELF: WHAT DO YOU NEED? WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

- What's the low hanging fruit?
- Who are your high performers, and what do they have in common?
- How do employees move up in your organization?
- Do you have any great employees that lack skills but could be trained to achieve at a higher level? Do you have a training program that could make those employees more effective?

DETERMINE WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE THROUGH WORK-BASED LEARNING

- Connecting with graduating students or those who still have a few years until graduation
- Developing a reliable pipeline for talent
- Finding students or grads to help you on a specific project
- Connecting with industry, government or educational partners
- Working with educators to develop a curriculum or design training programs that will help you hire trained workers for your business
- Creating awareness of your industry and the skills and career pathways needed to succeed in your business and industry.

DEVELOP GOOD PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships can be helpful to businesses of all sizes, especially small businesses where partnerships can extend the range of your activities—even if you are partnering with another small business, groups of businesses, or an industry association group. Which partner to call? There are a lot of partnership opportunities. Sometimes it's challenging to figure out where to start. You might need help. If so, consider emailing WBLinfo@mt.gov



Enough of strategy. Let's review some of the nuts and bolts of work-based learning.

AWARENESS

Workplace tours, guest speakers, career fairs, field trips.

This could be an hour to talk to a class or a half day hosting a tour. You can do it yourself or partner with similar businesses and approach it as an industry. It's a quick interaction with a larger group of students meant to develop broad interest and awareness of your business, skills needed to succeed, and pathways to develop those skills.

EXPLORATION

Job shadowing, informational interviews.

This is taking awareness to the next level for an individual—an hour answering more in-depth questions about your business or maybe a day letting someone shadow a specific person. It's a one-time interaction meant to help the individual decide whether to pursue more training. It's also an opportunity for you to get to know them as a potential future candidate.

PREPARATION

Classroom projects, student-run businesses, student organizations, pre-apprenticeships and internships.

This might look like your business contributing to school based efforts, assisting with a unit that teaches foundational skills of your industry, helping develop curriculum, or welcoming students to your business for shorter term experiences.

TRAINING

Apprenticeships, internship, on-the-job training, clinical experience, incumbent worker training.

This might look like students spending half the day at school and the other half at your business. It might include full time work during summers or school holidays. It will depend on the type of training and everyone's capacity.



KEYS TO SUCCESS

This is a broad category which cannot be covered briefly. That said, there are a few things that stand out.

- Match your needs with the emerging workforce
- Identify the skills that future employees will need
- Work with schools to interest and engage the workforce
- Develop the training activities needed
- Hire employees with the skills you need

Develop partnerships where possible, starting with schools. Not all schools are the same, of course.

K-12

The easiest way to get started is to call the school's main office and ask to speak to the principal. Identify yourself as a business owner/manager and explain you are exploring opportunities to partner and engage with students through work-based learning.

LOCAL COLLEGES

2-year or 4-year colleges are often tasked with providing students with both the education and experiences (hint) to result in meaningful employment.

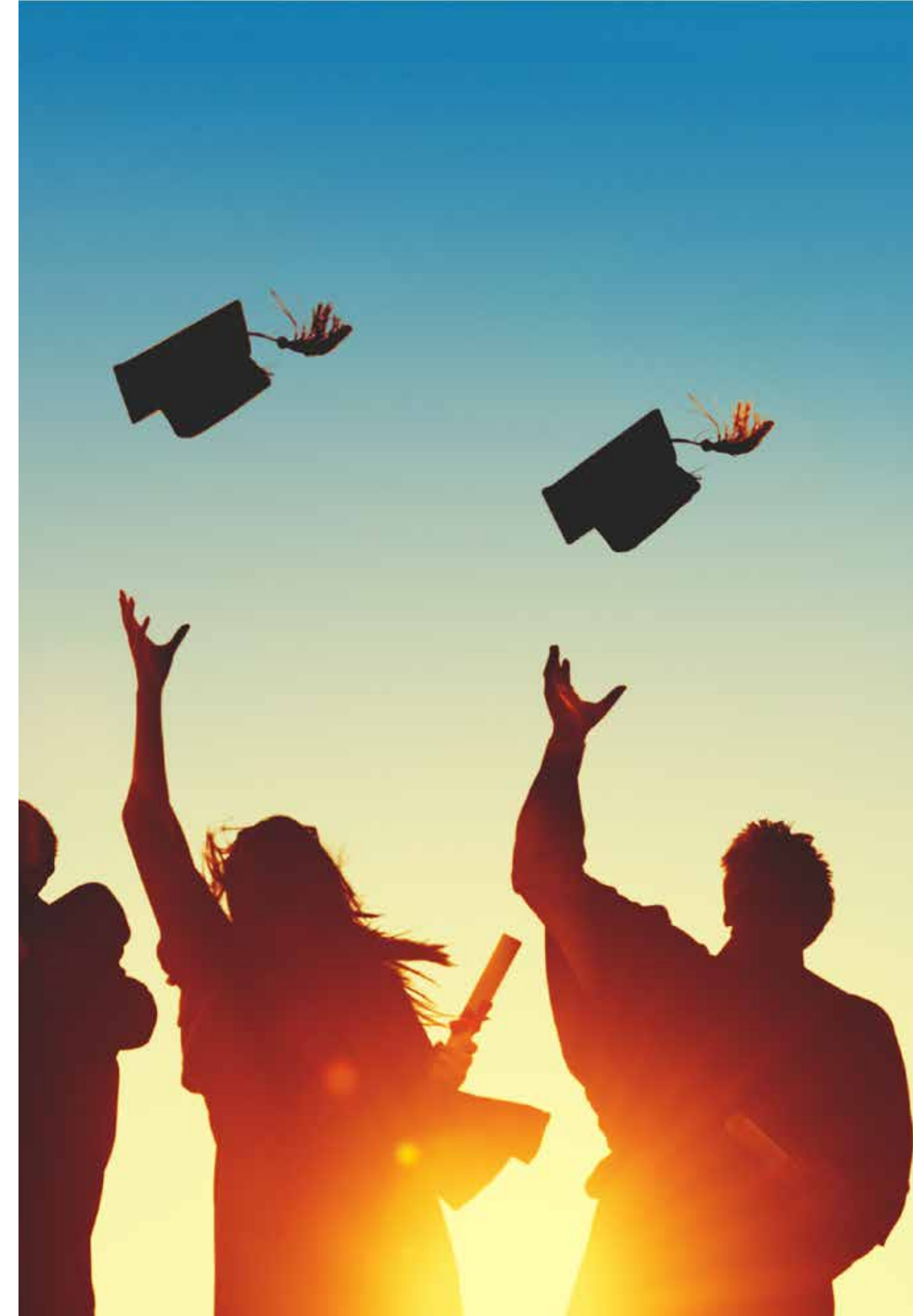
Call the administrator of the local college in your area or someone in the "Career and Technical Education" department to explore developing a business partnership.

You will find that many colleges have a division or department for workforce development which is, in a way, work-based learning in its early stages. These are often focused on career development, and these may also offer:

- Apprenticeship programs that combine classroom instruction with on-the-job training
- Customized training which can be tailored to your business
- Industry credentials

MIX AND MATCH IN WAYS THAT MAKE SENSE FOR YOUR BUSINESS

For some businesses, the end goal is to build a pipeline of talented workers that starts in middle school, high schools, or colleges and consists of some or all of the activities that we have discussed thus far in the levels listed above from building awareness (guest speakers and tours) to internships to hiring fulltime employees.



Everyone needs resources. Here are some good ones—starting with us. You can contact our Work-Based Learning team at WBLinfo@mt.gov

THE MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY

The Montana Department of Labor and Industry can assist you in the development of a high-quality work-based learning experience to help grow your talent pipeline. For assistance, please feel free to contact your local Job Service office. Local Job Service offices can provide funding for various training programs, maintain working relationships with education and training institutions, and can connect you with other non-training resources in multiple regions/cities within states.

INCUMBENT WORKER TRAINING

An employer-sponsored program that provides grant funding to assist eligible Montana small businesses to offset the cost of training for their existing (incumbent) workers. It intends to create a stronger workforce through developing employees and strengthening small businesses for Montana residents.

APPRENTICESHIP TAX CREDIT

Montana employers may apply for a tax credit for every new position hired where the worker is offered on-the-job training through the Montana Registered Apprenticeship Unit.

MONTANA WBL LIABILITY AND WORKER'S COMPENSATION CONSIDERATIONS

Provides an overview of liability insurance and worker's compensation coverage that businesses, agencies, and schools should possess to protect young people and others engaging in work-based learning activities.


MONTANAWORKS

Interactive online resource that provides a digital access point for department services. Customers can find real-time information on job matches, labor market information, Unemployment claim status, and apply for or renew their professional license.

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN MONTANA MYTH VS. FACT

Addresses common concerns and perceived barriers to hiring youth in the workplace.





CASE STUDIES

Why work-based learning?
Let's look at two success stories and see how some businesses achieved significant results.

Livingston

THE PROBLEM

Park County businesses were struggling to hire trained employees, and Park High school students did not know how or where they were going to get a job.

THE RESPONSE

Businesses partnered with the Montana Dept. of Labor & Industry's local Job Service office, the Livingston School District, Montana State University Extension, and the AMB West Foundation Extension (an Arthur Blank Foundation) and developed a variety of work-based learning experiences.

The partnership developed a four-year program that would provide students with an awareness of opportunities and connections to businesses and the experiences that they needed to develop professional skills to be workforce ready.

THE RESULTS

It's too early to see all the results, but what has happened in the first two years is encouraging. Businesses engaged with schools in various work-based learning activities such as guest speakers, interviews, site tours, industry panels, job shadowing, apprenticeships, and internships. Park County businesses in the agriculture, manufacturing and engineering, education, finance, marketing, hospitality and tourism, construction and the trades, and other industries all gained new interns.

A local towing company was able to take on an intern during the school year. During the internship, the student completed OSHA training and acquired a commercial driver's license and the company hired the student full time upon graduation.

ANOTHER SUCCESS

A local electrical contractor brought on a student as a DLI registered apprentice electrician, attending school for half the day and working for the contractor the other half. When the student completes their probationary period the contractor will be eligible for the \$750.00 Apprenticeship Tax Credit.

WHAT'S NEXT

Park County businesses are inviting educators to complete teacher "externships" in which teachers spend time in the summer learning about different businesses. The teachers then bring that information back into the classroom and curriculum. The externships expand work-based learning activities into middle schools to help students connect more quickly with career pathways.



Billings: building a pipeline.

THE 360 OFFICE SOLUTIONS STORY

360 Office Solutions is a full-service office products company that also provides software and workflow services in multiple cities throughout Montana. But in Billings, where they have an office, there was a problem: a shortage of trained tech support engineers. This shortage was compounded by the fact that many of the current technicians are aging and retiring.

As a result, 360 Office Solutions was struggling to fill positions. Without many options, they had to get creative. They reached out to the Billings Career Center to find students they could bring into the industry by offering to educate and fully train them as techs capable of working at 360 Office Solutions while still in high school.

360 Office Solutions worked with the school administrator to identify career classes that might have students who would have an interest and potential skills to succeed. Ultimately, Billings Career Center reached out to Montana Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship program to develop a Youth Apprenticeship

Fast forward and today two students attend high school for half the day and complete on-the-job training, on-site, with 360 Office Solutions. Students also have an independent study period to complete online industry-specific training as part of their tech support training. When finished, students will be fully trained for tech support jobs of the kind 360 Office Solutions requires.

