

National Academy Foundation Guide to Work-Based Learning: A Continuum of Activities and Experience



The National Academy Foundation (NAF) is an acclaimed network of career-themed academies that prepare high schools students for academic and career success. Five hundred NAF academies serve more than 50,000 students across 40 states, D.C. and the U.S. Virgin Islands and focus on one of four career themes: finance, hospitality & tourism, information technology, engineering, and health sciences.

For nearly 30 years, NAF has refined a proven model that provides young people access to industry-specific curricula, work-based learning experiences, and relationships with business professionals. Since its start, NAF has developed tools and resources to assist academies in providing internships and supporting advisory board development.

In 2009, NAF convened a task force of business, education, and workforce experts to develop standards for internships that resulted in “Preparing Youth for Life: The Gold Standards for Internships.” The task force laid out a vision for high school internships as the culminating experience of a continuum of work-based learning activities.

Building off this vision, we sought to collect the 30 years of wisdom and experience from NAF staff, academy staff, advisory board members, volunteers, and experts in the field in order to clarify the components of a comprehensive program of work-based learning that will create the maximum benefit for all academy students.

Work-based learning came to the forefront of educational policy with the enactment of the national School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. Since then states, local communities, and many organizations have defined and developed resources to support work-based learning. This document is also based on a review of a wide range of materials and reflects NAF’s beliefs and understanding of what defines quality work-based learning. It is the foundation for the further development and implementation of resources and support on work-based learning for NAF academies.

Thank you to everyone who assisted with this document, particularly NAF academy staff and business partners and our colleagues at ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Careers. We look forward to continuing this work together as we develop additional resources, tools, and professional development opportunities to support academies in strengthening the work-based learning component of the NAF model.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JD Hoye', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

JD Hoye
President
National Academy Foundation

NAF recommends all academy students experience carefully structured and sequenced work-based learning activities, preparing them to make informed college and career choices and allowing them to acquire the necessary college- and career-readiness skills. NAF believes that quality work-based learning experiences improve academic performance and post-secondary school outcomes for students.



NAF endorses a definition of work-based learning that includes a broad range of experiences tied to student outcomes. Under the NAF definition, work-based learning refers to a continuum of activities, both in and outside the classroom, that provides opportunities for students to connect what they are learning in the classroom to the world of work; to learn about careers and the education and training requirements for occupations within and across industries; to identify career interests and aptitudes, and to use the workplace for both learning and applying college- and career-readiness skills and knowledge.

Quality work-based learning experiences should:

- Identify learning objectives
- Be developmentally appropriate
- Assess student performance, including self-assessment methodologies
- Include an orientation for all parties
- Provide opportunities for student reflection
- Link to the student's next work-based learning experience
- Provide links between classroom learning and professional expectations

The Continuum of Work-Based Learning

The continuum of work-based learning includes **career awareness**, **career exploration**, and **career preparation** culminating with an internship.

The foundation of work-based learning is **career awareness**. Students begin these career awareness activities in elementary school and continue through middle school. Career awareness experiences provide students with opportunities to understand how school relates to the world of work. These activities typically include field trips to businesses and parents or other adults speaking about their jobs and why they are interesting. Students may also participate in projects in the classroom that are similar to those undertaken in workplaces. Volunteer activities in which students interact with adults in a workplace setting (e.g. visits to a nursing home) also help young people understand their place within the community. A variety of early workplace experiences can help to inform students' decisions about whether to enroll in an academy.

Career exploration provides students with a deeper understanding of the workplace. Career exploration activities, which typically begin in middle school or during the first year of high school, continue throughout an individual's working life as job opportunities shift and career changes occur. Career exploration activities provide students with a full understanding of the range of occupations within the industry on which their academies' focus, the skill and education requirements needed for these jobs, and an understanding of the relevance of academic and theme-based courses in their academies.

Career preparation activities are designed to help students acquire the foundational skills needed for college and career readiness. Career preparation activities begin to integrate academic skills acquired in the classroom with work-based skills obtained in the workplace. Emphasis is on skill building, understanding the concept of transferable skills, learning to work as a team member, establishing relationships, appreciating ethics and honesty, and relating personal interests and abilities to career opportunities. Most students participate in these activities beginning in the 9th and 10th grades. These activities, whether classroom or workplace based, are essential preparation for a student's successful completion of an internship.

Internships are the culmination of high school career preparation activities. Internships allow students to apply work-readiness and academic skills and learn specific occupational skills in a workplace setting. Internships are paid or offer some form of compensation to students in order to provide an authentic work experience. Internships typically occur during the summer between the 11th and 12th grades; though they may also take place during the school year, particularly during the 12th grade.

The NAF curriculum supports work-based education in each of these areas. Courses are organized around industry-vetted projects that replicate the types of tasks and assignments done by professionals in order to prepare students for work-based learning. The NAF curriculum is designed to involve advisory board members in the classroom to provide information and guidance, thus establishing key relationships that will benefit students.

Benefits of Work-Based Learning

Benefits to students

- Apply academic and technical classroom learning
- Develop workplace competencies
- Establish a clear connection between education and work
- Explore possible careers:
 - Identify and analyze personal needs, interests, and abilities
 - Identify and analyze potential opportunities in various career fields
 - Develop plans and make decisions to achieve goals and aspirations
 - Understand potential career paths
 - Identify college options based on career goals
- Improve post-graduation options for employment and further education and training
- Ongoing part-time employment and financial support for post-secondary education
- Practice positive work habits and attitudes
- Understand the expectations of the workplace
- Motivation to stay in school, earn a high school diploma, and a career certificate (when applicable)
- Establish professional contacts for future employment, mentoring, and networking
- Earn industry certifications

Benefits to employers

- Create a pool of skilled and motivated potential employees with the ability to adapt to an ever-changing, global job market
- Improve employee retention and morale
- Reduce training/recruiting costs for new employees
- Partner with schools to prepare students for their futures
- Provide developmental opportunities for current workforce
- Support local schools
- Generate positive publicity
- Establish meaningful relationships with young people
- Enhance capacity to manage a diverse workforce

Benefits to schools

- Expand curriculum and extend learning facilities
- Gain access to workplace techniques and technology
- Enhance the ability to meet the need of diverse student populations
- Provide opportunities for individualized instruction
- Promote faculty interaction with the community
- Contribute to staff development
- Make education more relevant and valuable for students
- Improve high school graduation rates
- Deepen community relationships

Learning Outcomes

Well-designed work-based learning activities have clearly identified learning outcomes and a method to assess whether the learning has been achieved, either through formal or informal assessment. These outcomes are based on employers' expectations for future workers. NAF has worked with a group of organizations to define the workplace competencies employers expect.

The following chart was prepared to support the Linked Learning initiative and is reprinted from “Career Practicum: A Work-Based Learning Strategy,” with permission from ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Careers. A majority of states and local school districts have incorporated some version of these workplace skills into their standards for learning. (Note: A number of states support the *Framework for 21st Century Skills*, developed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a collaboration of businesses, states and non-profit organizations.)

Category	Student Learning Outcome
Collaboration and Teamwork	Builds effective collaborative working relationships with colleagues and customers; is able to work with diverse teams, contributing appropriately to the team effort; negotiates and manages conflict; learns from and works collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, ethnicities, ages, gender, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints; and uses technology to support collaboration.
Communication	Comprehends verbal, written, and visual information and instructions; listens effectively; observes non-verbal communication; articulates and presents ideas and information clearly and effectively both verbally and in written form; and uses technology appropriately for communication.
Creativity and Innovation	Demonstrates originality and inventiveness in work; communicates new ideas to others; and integrates knowledge across different disciplines.
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Demonstrates the following critical-thinking and problem-solving skills: exercises sound reasoning and analytical thinking; makes judgments and explains perspectives based on evidence and previous findings; and uses knowledge, facts, and data to solve workplace problems.
Information Management	Is open to learning and demonstrates the following information gathering skills: seeks out and locates information; understands and organizes information; evaluates information for quality of content, validity, credibility, and relevance; and references sources of information appropriately.
Initiative/Self-Direction/Resourcefulness	Takes initiative and is able to work independently as needed; looks for the means to solve problems; actively seeks out new knowledge and skills; monitors his/her own learning needs; learns from his/her mistakes; and seeks information about related career options and postsecondary training.
Professionalism and Ethics	Manages time effectively; is punctual; takes responsibility; prioritizes tasks; brings tasks and projects to completion; demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior; and acts responsibly with others in mind.
Quantitative Reasoning	Uses math and quantitative reasoning to describe, analyze, and solve problems; performs basic mathematical computations quickly and accurately; and understands how to use math and/or data to develop possible solutions.
Technology	Selects and uses appropriate technology to accomplish tasks; applies technology skills to problem solving; uses computer programs easily; and is able to quickly access information from reliable sources online.
Workplace Context and Culture	Understands the workplace’s culture, etiquette, and practices; knows how to navigate the organization; understands how to build, utilize, and maintain a professional network of relationships; and understands the role such a network plays in personal and professional success.

In addition, the list below illustrates the kind of learning outcomes tied to each of the components of the work-based learning continuum.

Career Awareness

Students should be able to:

- Describe different careers and the pathways leading to a variety of careers
- Describe how core skills such as math and reading are used in the workplace
- Articulate the importance of post-secondary education and training following high school graduation

Career Exploration

Students should:

- Understand the skills needed to be ready for college and careers
- Know the skills needed for success in the workplace
- Understand how different elements of a high school academic experience are related to the workplace
- Have basic knowledge of employability skills
- Be able to articulate the options available and importance of post-secondary education to achieving career goals
- Connect individual skills and interests to variety of career pathways

Career Preparation

Students should be able to:

- Describe how the workplace functions and the skills required to succeed there
- Identify the core knowledge necessary to be prepared for success in a particular career path
- Complete the process of applying for employment (resume writing, interviewing, completing application form, etc.)
- Describe and use multiple resources to find jobs
- Identify and demonstrate appropriate work behaviors and etiquette
- Describe in detail a particular experience in a workplace, the skills necessary to succeed in that workplace, and how their high school's courses are related to it
- Describe how post-secondary college or training connect to a career path of interest
- Develop short and long-term employment plans
- Articulate the importance and elements of workplace safety

Internship

Students should be able to:

- Assess individual strengths and weaknesses in the workplace
- Demonstrate basic workplace competencies specific to applicable standards of learning
- Demonstrate job-specific knowledge and skills
- Apply basic academic skills appropriate to the workplace
- Articulate the connections between job requirements and academic skills
- Articulate to younger students, peers, and adults the value of the internship
- Develop career goals and a plan for achieving them

Career exploration activities include:

- Aptitude and interest assessment
- Job shadowing
- Informational interviews with adults
- Career fairs
- Classroom speakers and team teaching with industry representatives and/or post-secondary partners
- Tours of local one-stop career centers to explore resources and services
- Simulated business/industry projects
- College visits

Career preparation activities include:

- Summer work experience
- Part-time jobs
- School-based enterprises
- Community resource mapping
- Work-readiness training: interview skills, resume writing, job finding techniques, soft skills development
- Job fairs
- Unpaid, short-duration projects with business and industry partners
- Use of One-Stop Career Center and electronic job finding sites
- College research
- Work-focused clubs and national competitions, such as Junior Achievement
- Culminating projects provided within the NAF curriculum units for each academy theme
- Culminating internships

The “Career Practicum: A Work-Based Learning Strategy” identifies the characteristics that apply to internships and other similar experiences:

- Students have direct, systematic interaction with professionals from industry and the community over a period of time. This experience is an integrated part of a sequential preparation for college and career.
- The depth and length of the experience is sufficient to enable students to develop and demonstrate specific knowledge and skills.
- The experience prioritizes development of transferable, applied workplace skills while also seeking to reinforce and provide opportunities to apply what is being learned in the classroom.
- The experience is explicitly integrated into the student’s academic and technical curriculum and reinforces basic and higher order academic skills as well as technical skills.
- Students engage in activities that have consequences beyond the classroom or value beyond success in school and are judged by outside professionals from industry and the community using industry standards.
- Students develop skills and knowledge applicable to multiple career and post-secondary education options.
- These experiences typically include a closing or celebration activity.

Additionally, NAF believes internships should meet the following guidelines:

- They are related to the academy theme
- Students are paid or compensated (e.g. stipend)
- There is an individual student learning plan with clear learning outcomes
- There is a formal evaluation by work-site supervisor with a feedback loop to appropriate school personnel
- There are clear connections to academic or classroom instruction

Federal and state employment laws apply to internships, just as they do to any employment. These laws cover child labor protection, safety in the workplace, and pay for employment and workers' compensation.

- The federal Fair Labor Standards Act applies to youth employment under the age of 18. The law sets the hours students may work during the school year and identifies the occupations considered hazardous for young people under the age of 18. States also have their own child labor laws. Typically, the more stringent requirements, either federal or state, are those that are applicable.
- Occupational health and safety laws are administered by the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Health and Safety Administration.
- Whether an internship must be paid or may be unpaid or otherwise compensated is also determined under the Fair Labor Standards Act. A fact sheet at: [/www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm](http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs71.htm) provides basic information around this question.
- Workers' compensation requirements are determined exclusively under state laws (unless the internship is with a federal agency). Generally, requirements for workers' compensation coverage apply to internships.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students' roles and responsibilities:

- Actively participate in school and workplace experiences
- Develop meaningful learning objectives
- Participate in reflection activities to process workplace learning

Parents/Guardians' roles and responsibilities:

- Ensure students complete paperwork and curriculum requirements
- Support successful completion of internship
- Communicate with school personnel to monitor progress
- Participate in celebratory activities

Teachers' and other school staff's roles and responsibilities:

- Provide support for students and employers
- Monitor student performance in the workplace and resolve any issues that arise
- Prepare students for the workplace
- Prepare employers to work with high school students
- Make the connection between academic learning and the workplace
- Work closely with the employer and the student to ensure regular and effective communication

School district roles and responsibilities:

- Maintain and support policies and protocols to make work-based learning a viable method for helping students meet academic standards
- Support teachers' professional development to ensure they maximize the opportunities at the workplace
- Leverage available resources to make sure that work-based learning is supported within small learning communities

Workplace partners and worksite supervisors' roles and responsibilities:

- Collaborate with school staff to create learning opportunities for students at the workplace
- Assist students in writing learning objectives
- Train, coach, and guide students while they are involved
- Evaluate student progress toward learning objectives and on their development of workplace skills
- Maintain ongoing communication with teachers

Advisory board members' roles and responsibilities:

- Review work-based learning activities and curriculum and provide input
- Assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the academy's work-based learning program and recommend improvements
- Connect individually with students around career plans
- Provide support in the classroom around topics relevant to the workplace
- Assist in fundraising to defer additional costs associated with work-based learning activities
- Provide internships and other work-based learning experiences
- Recruit businesses and other partners to provide internships and other work-based learning experiences

Community agencies' and organizations' roles and responsibilities:

- Serve as an intermediary to connect teachers and other school personnel and students with businesses
- Provide student referrals to work-based learning activities, including work experience and internship opportunities
- Assist in preparing youth for the workplace
- Assist in supervising student workplace experiences
- Subsidize work experience and internships for eligible students
- Coordinate community-wide job shadow days
- Support the development of work-based learning experiences tied to classroom-based academic and technical learning

Schools, business, and others involved in work-based learning need tools, resources, and professional development to guide and support their efforts. The charts on the following pages identify some of the resources that are available under each category of work-based learning. NAF is committed to adding additional resources and professional development to enhance academies' work.

Many activities are appropriate at more than one grade level and students at each grade level may be involved in activities that fall within all of the categories of work-based learning. Career exploration and career preparation activities that begin at the high school level typically continue through post-secondary education and adulthood. The following charts provide guidance on how an academy might structure and plan its work-based learning activities. The most important considerations are that the activities are well-planned and properly sequenced to provide a progression of learning experiences for students—each one building upon the last.

Career Awareness Resources	Pre-9th Grade
National Academy Foundation naf.org	Parent visits to classrooms to talk about their jobs
America's Promise: americaspromise.org	Students accompany parents to work
Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work daughtersandsonstowork.org	Field trips to business and industry
The Fresh Air Fund freshair.org/programs/career-awareness-program.aspx	Community volunteer activities
	Class projects with a work theme
	Fundraising activities that require work-related skills

Career Exploration Resources	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade
National Academy Foundation naf.org	Aptitude & interest assessment	Aptitude & interest assessment	College research
US DOL Career Exploration Guides careeronestop.org onetonline.org	Visit to one-stop career center	Visit to one-stop career center	
Junior Achievement: ja.org	Visits to colleges	Visits to colleges	
Vocational Information Center khake.com/page64.html	Class speakers	College research	
	Job shadowing	Guest speakers	
	Career fairs	Job shadowing	
	Informational interviews	Career fairs	
	Simulated business/industry projects	Informational interviews	
		Simulated business/industry projects	

Career Preparation Resources	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
<p>National Academy Foundation naf.org</p> <p>Job Start 101, sponsored by the Business Roundtable jobstart101.org</p> <p>Cool Careers for Dummies amazon.com/Cool-Careers-Dummies-Marty-Nemko/dp/0764553453</p> <p>US Department of Labor dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/career.htm</p>	<p>Work-readiness training</p> <p>Summer work experience</p> <p>School-based enterprises</p> <p>Community resource mapping</p>	<p>Summer work experience</p> <p>Work-readiness training</p> <p>Unpaid, short-term projects with business and industry</p> <p>School-based enterprises</p> <p>Community resource mapping</p>	<p>Job Fairs</p> <p>Summer work experience</p> <p>Part-time employment</p> <p>School-based enterprises</p> <p>Community resource mapping</p> <p>Use one-stop career center and online job sites</p>	<p>Part-time employment</p> <p>Use one-stop career center and online job sites</p>

Internship Resources	12th Grade
<p>National Academy Foundation naf.org</p> <p>Career Academy Support Network casn.berkeley.edu/ Internship Handbook</p> <p>The School and Industry Pipeline toolkits, School year internships pynguides.org/syi/about.php</p>	<p>Compensated internships</p>

References and Resources

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218 West 40th St
Fifth Floor
New York, NY 10018

212-635-2400
www.naf.org