



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERIES

CONNECTED TO CAREERS:

EXPANDING EMPLOYER LEADERSHIP IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION
Center for Education and Workforce



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation is dedicated to strengthening America's long-term competitiveness. We educate the public on the conditions necessary for business and communities to thrive, how business positively impacts communities, and emerging issues and creative solutions that will shape the future.

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U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Career Development through the Employer Lens	3
Current Efforts to Connect Youth to Careers	6
A Customer Service Approach to K-12 Career Development	9
Implementing Employer Account Management	12
Conclusion.....	14
Acknowledgements.....	16
End Notes.....	17
Infographic	19

INTRODUCTION

Young adults face important decisions every day that are likely to impact future outcomes. This includes navigating potential career opportunities that can lead to job satisfaction and economic self-sufficiency. Career development practices in K-12 schools are designed to equip participants with the necessary knowledge, tools, and supports to make informed decisions about future occupations. Yet, students in this country remain largely uninformed of potential career pathways and the relevance of academics to the workplace. They are at risk not only of dropping out of school, but also unemployment, underemployment, or a large sum of education debt and no direction.

Recent federal legislation, such as the Every Student Succeeds Act, has brought national attention to improving both college and career readiness. Career development is a critical component, but there is widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of today's services.

A recent survey of high school juniors and seniors revealed that 54% do not believe school support services help them match their interests to potential occupations.¹ Approximately the same proportion is not adequately advised on the necessary steps to secure their desired career.² Today's millennials may be the best-educated generation in history, but they feel lost when translating academic pursuits into career opportunities.³

Employers also feel the consequences of poor career development. There are nearly 6 million open positions as companies struggle to find the right people with the right skills.⁴ More so, approximately 40% of employers report that workforce shortages reduce their ability to innovate or start new strategic initiatives.⁵ It is undoubtedly critical to the business community that students acquire the competencies and credentials needed to make the school-to-work connection.

States and districts are committed to taking action. Some are actively increasing the number of career development professionals within schools, creating a separate job function dedicated to delivering career advising, leveraging technology to create personalized career plans, or aligning career development programs to workforce needs. These best practices are well-positioned to better inform and prepare students for the world of work; however, there is one notable limitation—they are not designed to foster employer leadership. As companies look to create a pipeline of talent to compete on a global stage, how can the business community secure and maintain the supports it needs to play an expanded role in career development?

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) offers a new approach to answer that very question. It requires employers to manage relationships with K-12 schools much differently than in the past.

The new framework positions employers as customers of career development activities who are then responsible for locating the right partners to deliver high-quality employer account management—customer service practices that ensure the needs of the business community are being met. These relationships are at their core designed to provide students access to a network of employers as well as support businesses in need of talent.

To set up this new framework, this report begins with salient challenges employers face when engaging career development programs in K-12 schools. It then discusses current best practices in the field as well as the limitations of each approach. From there it introduces a new approach that helps employers prioritize career development and encourages business associations to drive solutions.

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE EMPLOYER LENS

Career development programs benefit students navigating the transition from education to the workforce. They engage youth transitioning directly after high school as well as those deciding how additional levels of education relate to future occupations.⁶ A range of direct services can be incorporated into any single program, including career planning support (e.g., personalized career plans), connections to career exploration and preparation opportunities (e.g., job shadowing, internships, and networking), and access to workshops on valuable job-ready skills (e.g., resume building, interview preparation, and soft skills training). Career development programs can also provide direct services to guardians and teachers. These equip adults with relevant information to support a student's career path.⁷

Career development providers recognize the importance of the employer voice to validate career pathways, yet the level of employer engagement in this space varies widely from program to program. Current practices focus on supporting schools and students while remaining largely unsure if the needs of the business community are truly being met. Improving outcomes for employers will require providers to view career development through a business lens. K-12 schools can begin this process by responding to two important questions:

- (1) Who is the point of contact responsible for delivering high-quality career development?
- (2) How do career advising practices link to a company's overall business strategy?

OWNING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT ROLE

Career development has roots in vocational education. Vocational counseling was a direct response to the Industrial Revolution, when young adults needed a more fine-tuned understanding of the emerging manufacturing and industrial professions.⁸ As this country began competing in an information-based, global economy, the need for career counseling expanded across multiple disciplines to provide all students—not just those on technical pathways—with relevant workforce information. This expansion led the career development function to become fractured across multiple positions. For companies looking to engage, the point of entry can vary from program to program and school to school, making it unclear who is actually accountable for ensuring the quality and consistency of programming within K-12 education.

For example, school counselors are traditionally responsible for delivering career advising programs. But they are overwhelmed with many responsibilities unrelated to career development, such as supporting the academic success and

the social and emotional development of students.⁹ These competing demands require school counselors to make hard decisions about what to prioritize, and deference is typically given to class scheduling support and managing disciplinary problems.¹⁰ Additionally, enrollment surges and budget constraints have left the average school counselor, where one exists at all, responsible for nearly 500 students—double the recommended number.¹¹ These factors continue to raise concerns about the capacity of school counselors to prioritize and take ownership of the career development space while performing all other required duties.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructors are also viewed as responsible for career development. They are not counselors per se, but they execute important advising activities while at the same time providing technical training.¹² CTE teachers or administrators may also directly engage employers to bridge the gap between the business community and the students they teach. Regional directors and planners, such as Education for Employment (EFE) directors in Illinois, are responsible for aligning CTE curriculum and program development to business and industry needs to help students make the school-to-work connection.¹³

CTE, however, has its limitations. As it currently stands, it is not positioned to address the career advising needs of students without access to or not enrolled

in CTE coursework. Even within CTE programming, the quality of employer engagement varies widely. This country needs a system in place for all students to have access to quality advising practices that are linked to employer validated career pathways.

School counselors and CTE teachers are just a couple of examples of who is involved in career development. Guidance from other K-12 administrators and parents is also critical. Career development should be a team sport where synergies across various actors lead to successful outcomes. However, the lack of standardization and coordination can not only leave students with a fragmented set of activities, but employers struggling to locate the right point of contact for sustained engagement. Career development should be a part of every educator's job, but it needs to be clearer who is carrying out the function as employers look to play an expanded role.

CONNECTING TO BUSINESSES

The modern workforce requires career advisors to have a more specialized set of knowledge, skills, and abilities than in the past. However, very few people within schools, if any, have a robust understanding of current labor market data and how occupational trends influence career pathways for youth. Little time is devoted to workforce analysis in graduate programs for the school counseling profession, and current career advisors are not required to hone these skills through professional

development opportunities. A rigorous and sustainable career advising operation will need to equip those assuming the role with the skills and competencies they need to be fluent in the language used by the business community.

Additionally, schools struggle with how to translate workforce needs into actionable steps for the education community and link programs of work to a company's business strategy. Employer needs are constantly shifting, but education providers are often not positioned to be flexible and responsive enough to maintain long-term relationships. This challenge will only become more difficult given the accelerated pace of the business environment. Career development

programs need a more effective process for securing and maintaining deeper connections with employers, understanding that such a relationship management process requires time, dedication, and flexibility.

More clarity over who owns the career development function within K-12 schools and how advising activities link to a company's business strategy is just a starting point for expanding employer leadership. However, failure to adequately address these two questions will result in a missed opportunity to help employers support rigorous career pathways for young adults.

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CURRENT EFFORTS TO CONNECT YOUTH TO CAREERS

Some states and districts are focusing on career development in important ways. Current approaches are dedicated to increasing the number of career counseling specialists, creating a career development position apart from the school counselor, incorporating new types of technologies for personalized career planning, and aligning programs to workforce needs. These best practices can be combined to meet the unique needs of students, yet they currently face limitations when it comes to supporting employer partners well.

INCREASING THE NUMBER OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT SPECIALISTS

One way schools are supporting career development is through specialized training for school counselors. The National Career Development Association (NCDA) has long provided training for career development facilitators.¹⁴ After approximately 120 hours of instruction, participants receive a credential signaling an aptitude for 12 competencies that include labor market information, employability skills, and career development models.¹⁵ Current school counselors can pursue the credential as a professional development activity to refine their knowledge. The more informed school counselors are about changing workforce needs, the more prepared they will be to address the career development challenges facing today's youth.

However, increasing the number of school counselors with training in career development does not alleviate the capacity constraints they currently experience when juggling multiple priorities and a growing student body. Career development is best owned by someone who has the bandwidth to manage the quality of activities and work closely with employer partners. This is not to say school counselors cannot take on this role; they just may not be in the best position to prioritize career development for all students.

CREATING A DEDICATED CAREER DEVELOPMENT FUNCTION

Another approach is to create a separate career development position, or center, apart from the school counselor. Some schools are integrating dedicated college and career coaches working as members of a counseling and education team, particularly in CTE. The Arkansas Department of Career Education launched an effort to fund a cohort of coaches for middle and high school students. This has similarities to efforts taking place in Alabama, where the state focused on hiring career coaches with experience working with the business community.

Dedicated career coaches increase the capacity of schools to meet student needs, but these activities can require additional funding outside of what cash-strapped districts are able to provide. Though some

states have prioritized funding for career coaches, philanthropic dollars have also begun to fill financial gaps when public reserves are unavailable.

Nonetheless, schools with dedicated career coaches still cite challenges communicating value to employers. The core mission of college and career coaching is to support and drive positive outcomes for students. Success is measured by student-centered outcomes (e.g., internship placement rates or number of acceptances into higher education) as opposed to measures that show flexibility and responsiveness to the business community (e.g., reduced time to full productivity).¹⁶ As a result, there is often also not much employer engagement beyond participation on advisory boards or corporate social responsibility commitments to work with students. Schools will continue to have weak employer engagement without an intentional mission to provide shared value for both employers and students.

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS

Online career assessments and e-portfolios have automated support services that used to require manual attention. Assessments focus on identifying student interests, skills, work preferences, and personality traits that connect to potential career paths. Full-service platforms, like Career Cruising and Kuder, offer personalized career plans for youth and can provide a streamlined platform for educators and employers to directly engage with students. These

platforms are important tools to match a student's interests and abilities with career pathways while giving administrators and teachers a vehicle to track progress.

Yet, technological tools are not meant to replace career advisors directly working with youth or the business community. They are often used in concert with face-to-face interactions to enhance the experience overall. So, while leveraging technology increases the capacity of schools to reach all students, it does not guarantee that those administering the tools have the content expertise to move a career plan or an e-portfolio into actionable steps that meet critical workforce needs. There still needs to be a professional adept at career advising to work with both employers and students along the way.

ALIGNING PROGRAMS TO WORKFORCE NEEDS

Career development programs can also focus on aligning services with workforce needs. CTE providers deliver programs around 16 career clusters, or groupings of occupations. These clusters can vary by state but are intended to equip students with a systematic plan for more than 79 career pathways and can include opportunities for college credit and industry credentialing.¹⁷ In this capacity, CTE delivers career advising, technical training, and immersion experiences for young adults.

The Linked Learning effort in California leverages a similar career pathways approach for all students, and not just those in traditional CTE programs. The effort combines sequences of courses, work-based learning experiences, and support services to increase the relevance of academics and provide students with the information they need to navigate the world of work.¹⁸

While aligning career development to workforce needs can yield powerful results for students when paired with high-quality academic preparation, even in these conditions it is unclear who is managing relationships with the employer community. Employer partnerships are critical to helping

students use their interests to navigate the dynamic needs of the workforce, but managing them can be a full-time job.

All four best practices are positioned to help students navigate career pathways, but there is much room to strengthen the employer voice. Companies are in search of solutions that allow them to enhance their brand recognition and develop relationships with talent much earlier in the education process. The business community can take more ownership over strengthening career development, but it will require new systems of support to bridge the gap between employers and K-12 schools.

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A CUSTOMER SERVICE APPROACH TO K-12 CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The business community is primed to drive solutions. It requires companies to build the right infrastructure and connect with the right partners who are committed to meeting their needs, but it does not require them to devise an entirely new system to carry out this role. They can simply adapt lessons learned from how they currently conduct business and create customer relationships on a daily basis.

Employers have long-established relationships with product and service providers to support critical business functions. As a customer, companies are partnered with account managers who ensure services rendered are meeting their needs, particularly in business-to-business (B2B) interactions.

Account managers are generally personnel assigned to a client (or multiple clients) with the primary responsibility of providing high-quality customer service. As the lead point of contact, they are also in charge of forecasting and tracking key metrics, understanding individualized needs, and coordinating timely solutions that meet the client's objectives. In larger companies, this position is typically separate from business development (i.e., new client recruitment). However, account managers can be in charge of both onboarding new clients and maintaining existing ones. This practice ensures that the client is satisfied

and the provider is compensated with a repeat customer—a win-win scenario.

Account management is also present in effective workforce development practices. The Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) employs account managers to strengthen private sector engagement. As the region's workforce investment board, Boston PIC brokers partnerships between business and youth through two critical positions. Career specialists work directly with the city's public high schools to recruit and prepare students for private sector jobs.¹⁹ They work alongside employer account managers, who are in charge of developing industry-specific expertise to guarantee their practices are meeting employer needs.

Skills for Chicagoland's Future is another workforce intermediary that utilizes account management. The organization employs client services managers to create deep relationships with employers. Managers are required to conduct regular meetings with companies and identify areas where service delivery can improve. Most important, these managers represent the client within the organization to make certain that employer needs remain a priority.²⁰

The business community can adapt the account management framework championed by B2B relationships and successful workforce intermediaries to strengthen their connection to K-12 schools.

Employers would position themselves as customers of career development activities and actively seek partnerships with those carrying out the employer account management function. Partners will be responsible for owning the career development role and forging direct connections to the business community. The most advanced partnerships would create an account manager position, separate from a school counselor, which supports a collaborative of employers connecting to young adults.

What would employer account management look like in practice? The function would at a minimum perform the following tasks:

Represent the business community within schools. Account managers will view employers as the end customer of career development and will certify that career advising activities are meeting employer standards of quality. To carry out this role, account managers must have deep expertise in industry trends and workforce requirements.

Serve as a subject matter expert on career pathways. Account managers will provide up-to-date information to students, teachers, and administrators on career pathways, particularly in high-demand fields. This information can help guide youth through personalized career plans and help them identify the skills and competencies needed for critical positions.

Vet and match students with employers.

Account managers will provide consulting support to employers to identify required and preferred industry credentials and other important hiring needs (e.g., drug testing requirements). This information will be used to appropriately place students in relevant career exploration or career preparation opportunities.

Validate skills acquired during work-based learning experiences. Account managers will be responsible for assessing and validating the performance of students participating in work-based learning experiences. They will oversee a systematic process of signaling to employers that a student has obtained the critical technical and/or professional skills (e.g., teamwork, communication, and critical thinking) in high demand by the business community.

Organize high-quality and diverse talent sourcing networks. Account managers will directly link to education providers to build the pipeline of talent that businesses need to compete. Such pipelines will help employers recruit high-caliber and diverse talent—an activity particularly important for companies looking for employees that mirror this country’s changing demographics.

There are many positive externalities of driving employer leadership through the employer account management approach. First, companies would be accountable for either delivering the career development function or identifying the right partners to carry out key activities. As the customers,

they would have an interest in validating that programs are high quality and sustaining activities that meet current and future workforce needs. Most important, serving employers as the end customer of career development promotes shared value for students and companies. Intermediaries such as Boston PIC and Skills for Chicagoland's Future focus on employer needs without sacrificing a commitment to developing the supply side.

When done well, these activities will place those delivering career development practices in a provider-customer relationship with companies in much the same way account managers provide quality customer service to build and maintain relationships with consumers. The result: stronger representation of employer interests in career development that also equips schools with the knowledge, skills, and workforce connections to support career exploration and preparation for youth.

Employer Account Management

Building and maintaining relationships with the business community by ensuring career development practices are high quality and meet workforce needs

Key Activities

- ✓ Represent the business community within schools
- ✓ Vet and match students with employers
- ✓ Serve as a subject matter expert on career pathways
- ✓ Validate skills acquired during work-based learning experiences
- ✓ Organize high-quality and diverse talent sourcing networks

IMPLEMENTING EMPLOYER ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Account management first requires the business community to view career development as an important part of how it manages human capital. But the success of the approach ultimately depends on how well employers can locate the right partners to carry out the employer account management tasks. There are three distinct paths for businesses to establish successful relationships: (1) integrate employer account management activities into existing school-based career development efforts, (2) outsource activities to intermediaries that bridge the gap between employers and schools, or (3) designate a direct agent of the business community to serve in this capacity.

SCHOOL DRIVEN

All of the key account management activities can work in concert with current efforts taking place in the field. School counselors, career coaches, EFE directors, or other positions providing career support can take on the key account management tasks. Businesses can then prioritize collaborative efforts with schools and districts that have integrated the account management function into career development activities.

Additionally, school counseling certifications can incorporate specialized training on employer account management. For example, the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council, in partnership with NCDA, is exploring the

creation of new credentials for a cohort of career development advisors. Incorporating training on employer account management into these certifications can help those in the career development role understand how to better serve the business community while providing opportunities for youth.

INTERMEDIARY DRIVEN

Many nonprofits, community-based organizations, workforce investment boards, and other intermediaries positioned outside of the business community are already matching young adults to career exploration, preparation, and employment opportunities. Examples include the Boston PIC and Skills for Chicagoland's Future referenced earlier. USCCF's recent report *Talent Orchestrators: Scaling Youth Employment Through Business-Facing Intermediaries* highlights how these organizations can become stronger employer partners, or more "business-facing," by executing a combination of services to manage human capital needs.²¹ This includes focusing on creating shared value for employers and youth, managing talent sourcing, and providing training and credentialing support for the demand and the supply sides. Business-facing intermediaries can expand their role to include providing high-quality employer account management. Companies can then leverage partnerships with these intermediaries to create stronger ties to K-12 schools.

BUSINESS DRIVEN

The business community can establish an account manager position that is a direct agent of an employer collaborative or association, but embedded within schools. While schools, community-based nonprofits, and government intermediaries may not perceive it as their mission to be accountable to employers, this path forward calls for business associations to employ an official agent of the organization dedicated to serving their member companies well.

Since these employer account managers are direct extensions of the business community, education providers and business associations can arrange cost-sharing or consulting agreements that support the position within schools or districts. Employers will consequently have the direct connection to students and schools needed to contribute to successful career development opportunities.

Business-Driven Employer Account Management in Practice: Vermilion Advantage

Vermilion Advantage is an economic development corporation based in Danville, Illinois, and borne out of a merger with the regional chamber of commerce. As a membership organization, Vermilion Advantage is dedicated to strengthening the local economy and increasing business investments in the region. Specifically, four industry cluster work groups meet regularly to update their job forecasts for new and replacement positions. They then decide how to share that information with area schools and to develop a plan of action to support career exploration activities for students in grades K-14.

In 2010, Vermilion Advantage entered a consulting agreement with Danville High School (DHS) to provide on-site career-related services from its workforce development specialist. This position has separate responsibilities from school counselors and academic advisors, but DHS serves as a host to connect the professional to the larger education team. The position is part time and is provided an office on the grounds to administer career resources, review resumes, and connect youth to employers through mentorships, job shadows, internships, part-time employment, and other career development activities. This workforce development specialist is directly responsible for having a deep understanding the needs of regional employers to support students transitioning into the world of work.

For students, online tools assess their values, personality, and career goals. These assessments are then used to create personalized career plans and provide youth with the relevant information needed to navigate a career pathway. For employers, the workforce development specialist is an agent of Vermilion Advantage's member companies, and is responsible for finding talent in key industries to ensure employer satisfaction while providing the essential skill development opportunities for students to succeed in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

As our country continues to compete on a global stage, our competitive edge will largely be determined by how well we prepare young adults for the jobs of the future. This paper focuses on how the business community can uniquely contribute to strengthening career development through a customer service technique that drives the private sector. Just as account managers ensure customers are satisfied with products and services, employers can locate the right partners to ensure career development practices are satisfactorily meeting business needs.

There are two steps the business community can take to implement employer account management practices. First, companies can recognize the importance of career development by partnering with schools and intermediaries integrating the employer account management function into current activities. This will require the employers to proactively seek out relationships with education and training providers that better align student outcomes with workforce needs.

Second, states and regions can explore how to scale efforts through a network of employers or business associations addressing the common workforce needs

of member companies. As a collective, companies will build the capacity to work with a larger number of schools and reach a larger number of students in the talent pipeline. Business associations can begin by organizing members to support placing one or more employer account managers in local schools or districts. This position can initially experiment in one or two priority industries or sectors, particularly where there is a skills gap and a need for employers to have more direct sourcing relationships. After the pilot phase, business associations can expand to be more inclusive of multiple pathways vital to their competitiveness. Moving toward business-driven employer account management not only will increase the employer voice in career development, it will ensure that youth are armed with the information they need to make decisions that lead to real career pathways.

While this report focuses on K-12 providers, once employers have more experience with this activity, it can be expanded into the postsecondary space or leveraged by community-based organizations targeting out-of-school youth. Regardless, the central goal of this approach is the same: build sustainable relationships with the business community in which value is shared between young adults and employers alike.

ABOUT USCCF'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERIES

As employers continue to struggle to find the skilled workers they need to compete globally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) commits to driving sustainable solutions that build capacity for employers to hire youth and young adults. USCCF's Youth Employment initiative engages chambers of commerce to explore how they are uniquely positioned to support the business community's efforts to create a talent pool of skilled workers. This series aims to highlight demand-driven approaches for chambers and other business associations looking to address youth unemployment to help America's economy grow, businesses remain competitive, and students access opportunities for success.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

The Center for Education and Workforce is a program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The center is dedicated to strengthening America's long-term competitiveness through informing and mobilizing the business community to be engaged partners, challenging the status quo, and connecting education and workforce reform to economic development.

To learn more about how you can engage in the Youth Employment initiative, contact Erica Kashiri, director of policy and programs at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Center for Education and Workforce, at ekashiri@uschamber.com or visit www.YouthEmploymentWorks.org.

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CONNECTED TO CAREERS

EXPANDING EMPLOYER LEADERSHIP IN K-12 CAREER DEVELOPMENT

54% Lack support matching interests to potential occupations

51% Not advised on steps to secure their desired career



Students have trouble navigating career opportunities.

PROBLEM

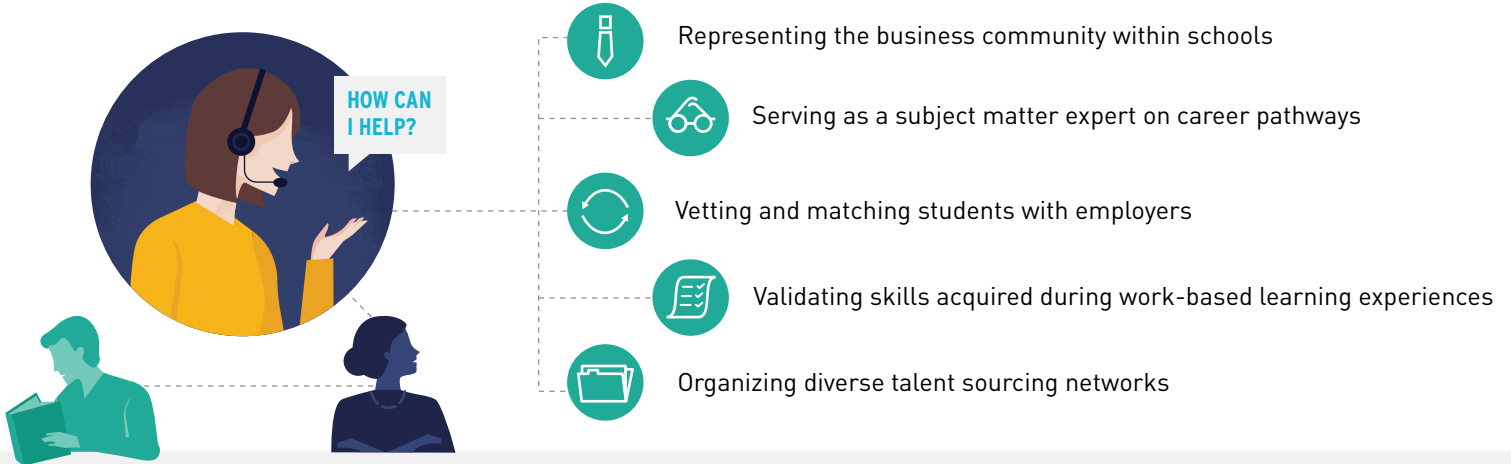


Employers struggle to find the right person for jobs critical to their competitiveness.

Help Employers Engage Youth Making the School-to-Work Connection

SOLUTION A CUSTOMER SERVICE APPROACH TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Just as the private sector deploys account managers to meet customer needs, **employer account management** can provide high-quality customer service to business partners by:



WHERE TO START EMPLOYERS MUST ACT NOW!



Collaborate with schools that integrate employer account management services into career development activities.



Connect to intermediaries that use employer account management to match employers and young adults.



Embed an agent of a business association to execute employer account management practices on behalf of member companies.

Employer Account Management: Forging Real Career Pathways for Today's Youth



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Learn more at
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