



What Are Work-Based Learning Intermediaries?



State Work-Based Learning Initiative

The College and Career Readiness and Success (CCRS) Center launched the State Work-Based Learning Initiative (Initiative) in April 2017. Planned as an ongoing collaboration with cross-sector state teams, the Initiative provides an ideal opportunity for states to strengthen the connection between academic content areas and career and technical education, build cross-sector infrastructure to increase the number and strengthen the quality of work-based learning (WBL) opportunities available to secondary students, and engage in cross-state peer networks to share emerging practices and strategies.

The Initiative is organized into four priority area peer networks that provide participating state members with the opportunity to define specific priorities, participate in cross-state learning, and engage with experts. Together, states in these networks focus on solving barriers or problems of practice that have impeded their WBL efforts. Each peer network develops resources and tools to help leaders in participating states as well as policymakers and leaders in states throughout the nation who are grappling with similar issues.

The Intermediaries Peer Network focuses on the valuable role intermediaries can play in supporting the implementation, scaling, and quality of WBL opportunities in a state. The peer network is examining existing state and local practices on key topics, including strategies for structuring and engaging intermediaries for connecting business and education, technical assistance and professional development support for building the capacity of intermediaries, and state policies related to intermediaries.

Defining Work-Based Learning Intermediaries

Effectively managing WBL opportunities requires a substantial amount of coordination to ensure that students have high-quality WBL opportunities. Because WBL spans the boundaries of state, regional, and local institutions, sectors, and agencies, the intermediary role is one on which many states and districts rely. The purpose of intermediaries is to support WBL or other career development activities for students. For this reason, states increasingly see value in supporting and building systems that rely on intermediaries, whether they are individuals or organizations. State support focuses on funding, vision setting, building formal industry/business and K–12 education partnerships, and myriad other activities.



Intermediaries facilitate partnerships between educators and employers for the ultimate benefit of a student's career exploration.¹

An intermediary is an entity (individual or organization) that primarily supports WBL or other career development activities for students.

The Role of Intermediaries

Intermediaries are key to facilitating relationships between and among stakeholders needed to increase the number of opportunities and quality of WBL for students. Key stakeholders include state agencies (including the state education agency and the state workforce investment board); local education agencies; community-based organizations; employers (business and industry); colleges and universities; and local and regional governmental agencies.

The role of the intermediary varies from state to state in terms of its focus and structure; however, several common characteristics transcend the various state and regional models. Intermediaries have access and analyze labor market information to identify priorities; they engage community-based organizations, employers, and industry or sector organizations; they recruit employer or business champions; broker WBL opportunities for students; and develop WBL course sequences with educational institutions.²

Individuals as Intermediaries

Individuals acting as intermediaries are often called coordinators and mainly monitor students' performance. They are sometimes housed within a school or district, and as such may be career technical student organization advisors, or a full-time or a part-time classroom instructor. WBL coordinators are typically placed at the school level, although some reside at the regional and district levels. In some states, WBL coordinators are currently certified teachers with additional training and endorsements provided by the state whose primary assignment is to work with either third-party intermediary organizations or individual local employers to set up WBL opportunities. In many cases, WBL coordinators are tasked with connecting education to business and directly develop tailored WBL experiences for interested students.

Organizations as Intermediaries

Intermediary organizations are often third-party, public or private, organizations that employ individuals to coordinate WBL activities. Intermediary organizations are outside of the state education agency and can be a current organization taking on new roles; they also can be a new organization built to support WBL activities. Intermediary organizations leverage the organization's network to increase WBL opportunities for students; oversee the challenges and needs of WBL; and focus on a state, sector, regional, or local reach and mission. Examples include a local chamber of commerce; a business or industry association; a local or regional workforce investment board or other government-appointed entity; a nonprofit organization; or a postsecondary institution.

¹ Advance CTE. (2016). *Leveraging intermediaries to expand work-based learning*. Silver Spring, MD: Author. Retrieved from https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/files/resources/WBL_casestudy_Intermediaries_FINAL.pdf

² Jobs for the Future. (2014). *Developing work-based learning and convening intermediaries*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://ptop-network.jff.org/sites/default/files/Developing%20Work-based%20Learning%20and%20Convening%20Intermediaries%20-%20Cahill%20Final.pdf>