Best Practices from the CCTA:
Centers Collaborative for Technical Assistance

The National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (NSF ATE) program focuses on the education of technicians for the high-tech fields that drive the nation's economy. The faculty members of community colleges, which are the main source of technician education in the United States, have leadership roles in the initiatives that involve partnerships with industry and other educators. Since 1994, NSF ATE initiatives have developed a wide-range of innovations to serve students better and inform educators.

A group NSF ATE centers formed the Centers Collaborative for Technical Assistance (CCTA) in response to a Department of Labor request to NSF for technical assistance services to recipients of Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grants. The centers are National Center for Convergence Technology (CTC), South Carolina ATE National Resource Center (SCATE), Florida Advanced Technological Education Center (FLATE) and Bio-Link National Center (Bio-Link). The identification and sharing of NSF ATE best practices are among the services CCTA offers.

DEVELOP INTERNAL & EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL GRANTS

The National Science Foundation and other funders strongly encourage projects to utilize partnerships. Here's the reason: The combined efforts of multiple, engaged stakeholders increase the likelihood that proposed innovations will happen and be sustained. Even if a program solicitation does not require formal partnerships, proposals are more competitive and funded projects are stronger when they actively engage 1) employers 2) strategic internal partners such as administrators and faculty, and 3) strategic external partners such as workforce development boards and professional organizations. Don't go it alone.

HALLMARKS OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- Mission alignment
- Common values & goals
- Measurable outcomes
- Shared commitment to the approach
- Capacity to deliver on promises

TIP: Stand-out with old-fashioned mail.

Mass emails are not effective. To make a good, first impression with a prospective partner, send a personalized letter explaining your project and inviting the recipient to an event. Sign the letter—with your real, pen-in-hand signature—and mail it using a stamped, hand-addressed envelope. Follow-up a few days later with a phone call.

CRAFT AN "ELEVATOR" SPEECH

Whether pitching your project idea to potential industry and community partners or your institution's leaders, it is essential to summarize your vision into a coherent "elevator" speech. This speech should be about two minutes; its name refers to the length of time it would take to explain something to a stranger during an elevator ride. To sell your idea:

- Write three-to-five sentences that summarize your project.
- Practice this elevator speech until you can make your points in a natural tone from memory.
- Tailor your elevator speech when gathering support for your ideas with faculty and administrators on campus and when introducing your work to potential employer partners.

STEPS FOR STARTING WITH POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Learn all you can about the potential partner in advance.
- Have a concise and clear reason for the initial interaction.
- Communicate—don't just talk at them.
- Tailor your elevator speech to explain how your project connects with their goals.
- Listen to their interests and concerns.
- Explain the benefits for each partner and your project.
- Pivot when necessary to suggest and discuss alternatives.
- Respond flexibly to involve partners in ways that matter to them.
- Take the lead in follow-up communications and to express gratitude for their involvement.
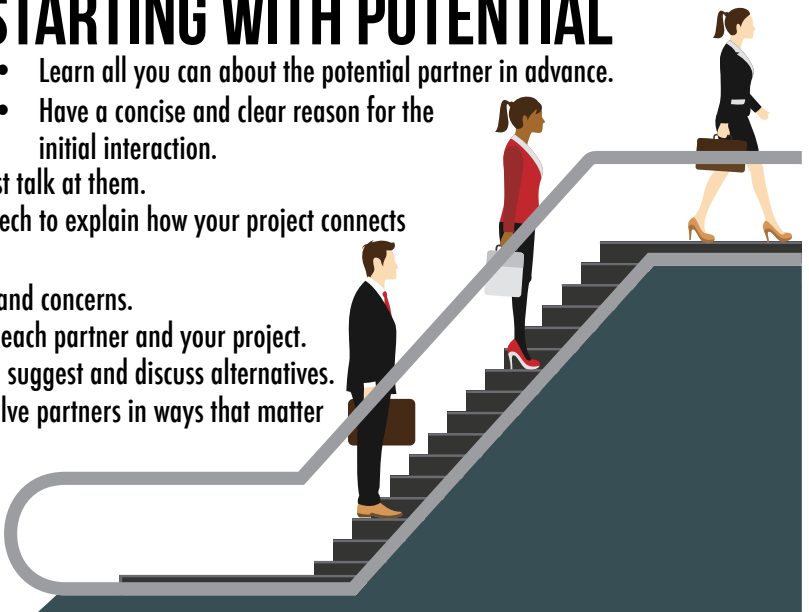
MAKE PARTNERSHIPS PERSONAL

As in a marriage, effective partnerships depend on candid, frequent conversations. Partners must be able to talk about what is working, what's not working, and how to adjust. Mutual appreciation of partners' motivations and cultures is critical. For grant-funded projects, involve partners during the development of the proposal as well as during implementation.

BEGIN PARTNERSHIPS AT YOUR HOME INSTITUTION

Grant-funded projects bring additional work as well as additional funds. So build alliances at your college while you are preparing a proposal to ensure that a project starts well and has the necessary internal support to succeed.

- Align your project with the college's strategic mission.
- Use your customized elevator speech to win the support of key personnel (i.e. deans, vice presidents, the president, faculty leaders).
- Keep internal stakeholders, including administrative support personnel, well informed.
- Volunteer to present information about your project at meetings of the college's board, faculty, and staff.

TIP: Courtesy Counts
- Thank partners publicly and regularly for their participation and contributions.
- Mail personalized thank-you notes to your working partners.

What's In It For Me?

Even if they don't explicitly ask, partners want to know: What's in it for me? Figure out what partners want. Be ready to explain why they should work with you.

WAYS TO MEASURE PARTNERSHIP OUTCOMES

As critical components of your project's success, it is important to include partnerships in your project evaluation. Consider the following: Does the partnership activity

- lead to collaborations?
- produce the desired impact and deliverables?
- lead to mutual efficiency?
- strengthen both entities?
- seed process innovations?

A SAMPLING OF CCTA COLLABORATORS' PARTNERSHIPS

Bio-Link & BABEC
The Bio-Link National ATE Center (Bio-Link) and the Bay Area Bioscience Education Community (BABEC) work together on biotechnology educational and professional development activities. For one initiative BABEC employs community college students to calibrate micropipettes and other materials donated by industry for classrooms.

CTC & its BILT
The National Convergence Technology Center (CTC) works with its Business and Industry Leadership Team (BILT) as co-leaders. CTC staffers, partners, faculty, and BILT members meet quarterly: once annually in person and three times via conference calls. Because program outcomes are mutually beneficial, BILT members and educators truly collaborate to plan activities and develop curriculum aligned with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers consider essential for workforce-ready information technology technicians.

FLATE & MFG Partners
The Florida Advanced Technological Education Center of Excellence (FLATE) coordinates multi-layered partnerships throughout Florida to provide more than 100 Manufacturing Day student tours to increase awareness of manufacturing career pathways. Partners include students, educators, manufacturers, government agencies, community and professional organizations, and school districts.

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CCTA | CENTERS COLLABORATIVE FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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