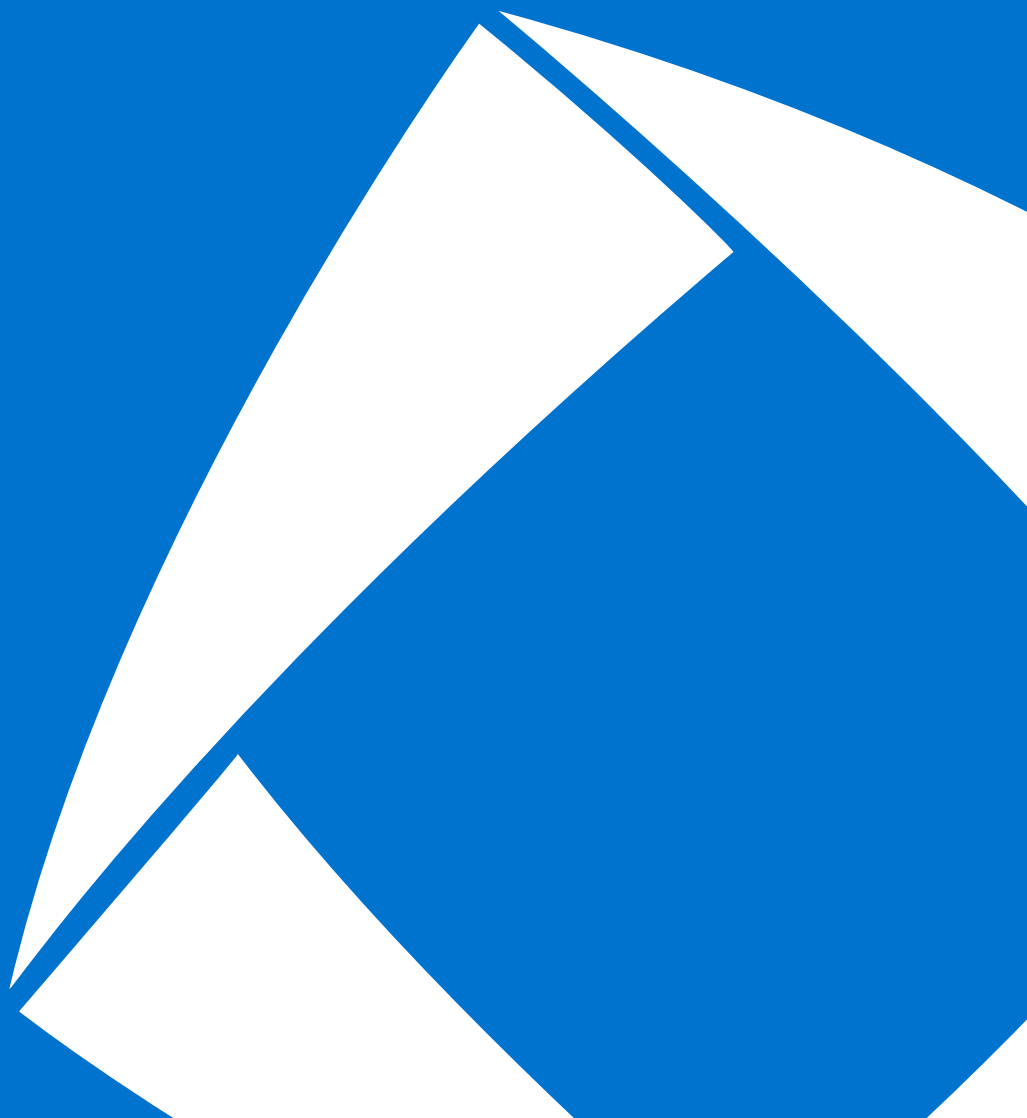
DECA

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GUIDE





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THE VALUE OF PARTNERSHIP

The world is changing at a warp speed, and so too is the influence of technology on the future of education and work, the growing prioritization of social responsibility, work-life balance, DEI, and mental health resources in the workplace. One important way to keep your finger on the pulse of what is happening in business and in the community, and help prepare students for what lies ahead, is through meaningful partnerships. Connecting to a diverse mix of partners will allow your chapter to:

- Bridge the classroom to career and industry topics with real world examples
- Promote expanded career exploration among students
- Reach membership goals more easily
- Create a network of support for competitive events
- Provide opportunities for students beyond the classroom

Cultivating and maintaining meaningful partnerships will likely lead to thought partnership, financial support and other essential chapter resources.

PARTNERSHIP V. SPONSORSHIP

When promoting engagement opportunities with your DECA chapter, it's important to distinguish between partnerships and sponsorships. The two can overlap and evolve — a partner may sponsor a specific event as one piece of a broader collaboration, and a sponsor's relationship may deepen into a full partnership over time — but they remain distinct categories with meaningful differences.

PARTNERSHIP	SPONSORSHIP
Shared decision-making	Sponsor has little control
Collaboration towards shared goals	Transactional and one-sided
Deep ongoing relationship	Limited scope and duration
Mutual interest in long-term success	Financial support for promotional benefit

Ideally, chapters will develop a diverse mix of partners and sponsors. Partners help inform strategy, curriculum, and program implementation by sharing resources, volunteering in and out of the classroom, and investing in the chapter's success. Sponsors support conferences, awards, travel, and more with financial and other resources.



PARTNER ASSESMENT

Whether you've been leading your chapter for decades or for a period of months, taking stock of your partnership mix on a regular basis is good practice. Because partnerships are intended to support both advisors and students, it's a great time to consider the kinds of partners your chapter is missing to fully meet your needs.

- **Do many of your students plan to stay close to home after graduation?** Connecting to local colleges, universities, and trade schools may excite them.
- **Are students struggling with Personal Financial Literacy?** Perhaps partnering with a local banking institution would be useful.
- **Is your chapter in a tourist area and students are interested in exploring hospitality careers?** Maybe partnerships with local hotels, sport venues or theme parks would provide opportunities.

Remember, throughout the year and certainly at the end of the year, to make a point of thanking your partners for their support. Let them know when something great happens with your chapter, report back on competitive event results, and brag about community involvement. Essentially, find reasons to remind them why they partner and reinforce the reasons to continue. This should all be a part of a communications strategy that will ultimately improve partner engagement and retention.

CREATING A WIN-WIN-WINNING STRATEGY

Putting a spotlight on the partners' and sponsors' return on investment (ROI) is always a good idea – it encourages their repeat performance. You must also be able to reflect on how advisors and students benefited. Consider all business engagements as a three-legged stool. Each leg represents a stakeholder whose needs are met through meaningful engagements.



1. **Partner/Sponsor –** Provide analytics that help illustrate the ROI, such as data on conference attendance, website clicks, number of students served, etc.
2. **Chapter –** Quantify how this engagement helps the chapter, enhances your classroom learning, makes your job easier and meets DECA's mission.
3. **Students –** Qualify how members benefited from having access to new information, new platforms, career and college readiness tools, and exposure to the voice of business.

If any of the legs are short, the stool tips over. Thinking through your strategy for selecting the best partners and sponsors will ensure stability, while maintaining the DECA brand and mission.

ENGAGING PARTNERS IS SERIOUS BUSINESS

Businesses want to be viewed as more than purely a financial resource. By successfully engaging them in all things DECA, deepened partnerships – and conversions from sponsorships to partnership – will naturally grow. Opportunities for engagement may depend on the type of business, how they align with DECA's career clusters, transportation concerns for off-site activities, the size of the company, etc. There should be at least a few ways any company can engage. Creativity is the key. These include but are not limited to the suggestions below.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer judge recruitment for DECA conferences can often be a challenge, particularly when the healthy number of online volunteer registrations doesn't match the actual volunteer attendance, and you find yourself on competition day scrambling for judges. It's expected there will be a certain number of no-shows due to illness, office emergencies, and last-minute meetings. We can try and prepare with 120% registration commitments, back-up friend and family judges, and the like. However, if it seems that each year the commitments fail to reach an acceptable level, there are a few things to consider trying in your recruitment strategy.

- Develop a recruitment toolkit (visit **deca.org/brand** for recruitment resources and templates) for your chapter and for school connections and industry prospects to share with their networks on social media.
- Build a taskforce/team to help with the efforts. Loop in parents, administrators, and the central office to amplify the need for volunteers. Encourage them to sign up as well!
- Establish "recruitment champions". These are the businesses that support your chapter and can help share the need for volunteers with their networks. Have your chapter thank them in a social media post/story, as well as other companies that provide volunteers.
- Connect with your area Chambers of Commerce to share with their membership.
- Consider large employers in your area, specifically those with volunteer initiatives and incentives for their employees.
- Reach out to professional associations that may have chapters in your area (i.e. Florida Institute of CPAs)
- Other potential resources for volunteers include:
  - Colleges and universities
  - Your DECA chapter alumni
  - Businesses where your student members and/or their parents may work
  - Businesses in your community that match the competitive events (i.e. Chick-fil-A for Quick Serve Restaurant Management, Hilton for Hotel and Lodging Management, etc.)



SPONSORSHIP

There are some businesses that are not currently positioned for partnerships and instead may be perfect targets for sponsorship. These opportunities can be marketed as a one-time or limited engagement, so that the chapter and the business can evaluate the effectiveness of the relationship and decide to continue as sponsors in the future – perhaps at a higher level – or progress the relationship towards partnership.

Potential businesses that may be interested in sponsorship may include:

- New businesses to the area that may benefit from the exposure of their name/brand
- Community-oriented businesses with a mission to support education, such as banks, restaurants, foundations and other nonprofits
- A brand or company that has as its customer the Board of Education or school district for things like office supplies, cafeteria provisions, delivery services, etc.
- A software/tech company or platform provider that supports the schools or strives to be a provider of choice

Remember, in addition to the motivation these companies may have for promoting their brand, products and services, they are also employers and potential volunteers to tap for other engagement opportunities described in this toolkit.



CLASSROOM COLLABORATION

Think of partners and sponsors as living Classroom Connections. There are myriad ways classroom visitors can be utilized to help complement the great work being done to prepare students for careers, college, competition and more. Deciding when and within which areas of study to include these subject matter experts and human resources will depend on the success in recruiting them. Suggestions include:

Mock Interviews
Work with businesses to invite HR managers, owners and others with experience in hiring to practice interview skills with students and provide feedback. This can also be done virtually as needed, to broaden recruitment options.

Career Exploration
Connect with local businesses and national DECA partners to explore with students the diversity of opportunities related to DECA career clusters and expose them to prospective employers, exciting new roles, and industries they may not have considered.

Guest Speakers
Identify guest speakers who are inspirational, have relatable stories to tell, learned an important lesson navigating college-to-career, are successful entrepreneurs, etc. Connect their visits to topics being taught in the classroom or invite them to speak at chapter meetings. These may be DECA alumni, local business owners, friends, relatives, or parents of DECA members, a local celebrity, etc.

Competitive Event Preparation
Partners and sponsors can act as guides and mentors for students as they prepare for competitive events such as BOR or the IMC events. Being able to consult marketing and operations team members from companies that are the focus of the scenarios gives students a huge advantage for a well-prepared presentation and creates a tremendous learning opportunity. These partners can review, support and be an audience to ensure the members are on track throughout the process.



BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Equally as important as bringing the voice of business into the classroom is giving students exposure to the world of work from a perspective other than as a customer. Whether it's a behind-the-scenes tour of a business, or the opportunity to hear from team members from a variety of disciplines about what a typical day is like in their roles, nothing compares to a peek behind the scenes. This may also be educational for advisors, who may be less familiar with some industries or businesses and can then better guide students as they explore careers. DECA Inc.'s national partners and chapters' local businesses provide excellent options for these experiences.
Potential tours may include:

Retail Stores
Get a look at store operations from the floor, back room/receiving area, customer service/concierge and management office. Hear from a store manager about careers in retail, from store roles to corporate careers and their own career story.

Hotel Properties
Most people think of front desk clerks and housekeeping when they think of hotels. Tour event spaces, sales offices, kitchens and more, and learn from key staff what makes this small city run like clockwork.

Restaurants
Whether students are interested in culinary, marketing, finance or management, there could be a role for them in the restaurant industry. Glimpse all aspects of restaurant operations and hear from staff about their passions and diverse opportunities.

Apartment Communities
Surveys show that 40% of participating DECA members are interested in business management. Property management is a fantastic example of running a business, with on-site, regional and corporate roles. Tour a property and learn from staff about this often-overlooked career in a booming industry.

Banks
With many financial institutions in most communities and high interest among DECA members to pursue finance related majors and careers, touring a bank may allow students to ask questions, learn about roles they didn't know about and/or connect with a prospective mentor or recruiter. This connection may also be valuable for sourcing finance content to support competitive events and your students' financial literacy needs.

Small Businesses
Entrepreneurship is a growing passion among Gen X, including DECA members. More than 40% of DECA members surveyed say DECA has fueled their interest in business ownership. Identifying one or two local businesses that were started by entrepreneurs may be an effective way to provide additional guidance for those preparing for competition and those who have an interest in starting a business. This is a prime opportunity to hear from entrepreneurs/business owners what some of their challenges have been, what ultimately led to their success, and what advice they have for students. These may be good potential sponsors if they are trying to get their companies more recognized in the community.

Sports/Entertainment Venues
There is a lot to learn about the management and operations of a sports arena or entertainment venue. Visit a sporting or entertainment venue (theme park, concert hall, convention center, etc.) and learn what the day-to-day operations requires; explore the intricacies of the back-of-the house; understand when and how cost of ticket sales is determined; discover marketing outreach strategies (digital vs print); find out how development/ contract of group sales works; learn about careers within the industry, and more. This could be a great opportunity for internships and future employment opportunities for DECA members who have an interest in the field. In addition, visits can connect chapters to guest speakers for the classroom.



MENTORSHIP + WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

MENTORSHIP

Partnerships provide an opportunity to create formal or informal mentorship programs to support members. Whether the mentors provide the support in a group format, so that all can participate, or the program is aimed at DECA Seniors, who receive one-on-one mentorship, involving business partners for additional student career and college guidance is beneficial.

Some things to consider when developing a mentorship program include:

- How mentors will be selected
- Pairing the mentor and mentee
- Career interests vs. industry representation
  - College interest vs. alumni
  - Diversity & Inclusion
  - Goals and objectives of the program
- Group or individual mentorship
- Length of program
- Frequency of meetings
- Virtual or in-person meetings
- Feedback and measurement of program success

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Certain partners and sponsors will be interested in working with DECA because they have a need for developing their talent pipeline. They may see their connection to high school chapters as both a short- and long-term strategy.

Job Shadowing

It can be tricky getting businesses to agree to job shadowing, mainly due to worker's compensation concerns. However, the chances are that smaller companies may be more likely to agree, since they won't have powerful legal teams in a corporate office telling them not to. This experience can be truly valuable for respectively. The job shadowing can be as short as a half-day on a weekend or as long as a week, perhaps over a holiday break or summer.

Summer + Part-time Jobs

Local retailers, hotels and restaurants may recruit students for summer and part-time work with the hope that they continue to work part-time during the school year, over breaks and in college, etc. If the manager has done a good job and planted the seed well, the student may decide they love the work and the company and will stay on and move up in the company.

Full-time Jobs

Some students will decide that the traditional 4-year college experience is not for them, or at least not right now, and decide to go directly to work full-time or work while they pursue community college or a trade school. This contributes to a partner's short-term workforce development strategy of supporting DECA by engaging deeply and getting involved at various levels, so that they establish name and brand recognition. Students gain exposure during the year and may think of these partners when it comes to considering employment and careers.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are becoming more and more popular, in large part because of the funding that has been made available by the U.S. Department of Labor to encourage companies to provide training and upskilling that leads to advancement in careers. Some apprenticeship programs are aimed at entry-level workers and high school graduates who are not necessarily collegebound, and want to train inside a company for a specific career. There may be some DECA partners at the local and national levels offering these opportunities. The American Hotel & Lodging Foundation is one example of a national DECA partner with this opportunity.



LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

LOCAL PARTNERSHIP OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Partnership development includes a plan that combines the goals, resources and activities of the partnership and a clear understanding of each partner's expectations and how success will be measured. There can be differences in the outreach strategy among prospective partners, depending on the size of the business, whether the business is local, regional or national, and if the company is headquartered in your city or state.

One essential element of a partnership outreach strategy is a well-developed sales pitch highlighting why a business should partner with DECA.

Other considerations when deciding which businesses to approach and when to approach them include:

Economic Conditions – prospect partners and sponsors who are contributing to the local economy

Workforce Needs – identify partners and sponsors who have ongoing workforce needs and whose industries are stable and/or growing

REACHING LOCAL/REGIONAL BUSINESSES

Establish your Partnership/Sponsorship Goals

Do you need money for student travel? Judges/Mentors for competitions? Classroom industry presentations? Is the focus of your partnership strategy money, time, expertise or all 3? Rank your priorities and make sure that the chapter is clear on these goals.

Identify Leads

Once you've established your goals and priorities, consider community and regional businesses that would be a good fit. This is where research is a terrific skill to hone and DECA members can do a lot of the legwork.

Develop your Pitch

Have your students draft an elevator pitch on why partners should consider working with your chapter. Consider having your students create a call-to-action video and draft a partnership agreement to share with companies in your area. Do not be afraid to enlist your students with the task of cold calling and prospecting—this is great practice and a way to develop those sales skills! Do not lose sight of the WHY for industry partners. Include benefits to the partner such as social media spotlights, invitations to DECA meetings for speaking opportunities, etc. Your elevator pitch should be concise, about 30-60 seconds long, and should:

- Provide a personal introduction
- Give a brief explanation of DECA and what you are doing
- Communicate the problem you can solve by partnering + your unique value proposition
- Conclude with a call to action

Utilize your Networks + Leverage Connections

Share your need for partnership and sponsorship with your administrative teams and parents. Many may have connections with local/regional businesses and can make a warm introduction. Remember to post on LinkedIn and other appropriate social media channels so that your networks, near and far, can consider how they can help or whom they may know that can.

National Companies

While it may be more difficult to attract a larger/national company or brand, it is not impossible. Many local businesses have budgetary dollars set aside for local community engagement/philanthropy and some also provide VTO (volunteer time off) to their employees. Reach out to the local store, restaurant or hotel manager and share your partnership needs. Some may need clearance from district or regional managers, while others may be able to greenlight the partnership. If you're looking for larger monetary donations than your local contact can provide, ask them for a connection to the district/regional manager or corporate contact to gain support on a larger scale.



CONNECTING WITH DECA NATIONAL PARTNERS

DECA's partners and sponsors include corporations, foundations, associations, and colleges and universities that seek to support the development of leaders and entrepreneurs positioned to be successful in a global economy. They see DECA members as their companies' future employees and leaders, their associations' members and staff, and their schools' future alumni.

DECA Partners

DECA Partners are companies that support DECA programs at key times throughout the year - exhibiting, advertising, volunteering, advisor professional development, and more. These valuable relationships offer companies a flexible way to engage: DECA Partners invest through a specific fee-based structure depending on the type and level of engagement. Depending on their location, DECA Partners may engage at the local, state, and/or national level, and are particularly interested in connecting with DECA members. Email partner@deca.org to learn more about connecting with DECA Partners.

DECA Premier Partners

Premier Partners are DECA's most highly engaged partners. These deepened partnerships create opportunities to engage at the local level by providing real-world applications for learning. Premier Partners are featured on deca.org/partners. To receive communications from Premier Partners, be sure to opt in for partner emails through the membership system. To contact a Premier Partner for state and local engagement, email partner@deca.org.

DEVELOPING BUSINESS ADVISORY GROUPS

Business Advisory Groups, made up of key partners representing a diverse mix of organizations, can support career readiness activities in and out of the classroom, advise on program development and business trends, and contribute to volunteer recruitment efforts. This group will provide thought partnership and valuable input as chapters are making decisions that benefit from industry support.

This may also be the primary resource that chapters tap when support for mentorships, mock interviewing and competitive event preparation is needed, because these partners are the most engaged and invested in DECA's success and mission.

Pathways in some states require advisory boards, including CTSOs. Whether it's required or not, advisory groups can be a valuable asset.

Considerations as Business Advisory Groups are developed include:

Number of Participants

The number of group members should be in proportion to the number of total chapter partners. The suggested size range at full maturity is between 5-8.

Length of Participation

This opportunity may be promoted as a renewable one-year commitment. Chapter advisors will evaluate the value and contributions of the members to the group and chapter to determine whether they are renewed or replaced.

Minimum Requirements

You may determine certain requirements of group members, such as being a partner for a minimum number of years, a minimum number of volunteer judges recruited per event, or a commitment to at least one classroom visit, etc.

Ideal Mix

To ensure that the guidance provided by the advisory group serves the needs of all chapter members, it is advised that the participants be representative of a variety of businesses and industries. For example, DECA Inc. Premier Partners include corporate and industry association partners (retail, hospitality, financial, real estate) academic partners and vendor partners.



MARKETING MATERIALS

COMPELLING MARKETING MATERIALS AND LEAVE BEHINDS

In addition to having a strong sales pitch that immediately details the benefits of DECA partnership or sponsorship, consider the other marketing materials needed to gain commitment. The Rule of 7 is alive and well and having several marketing tools to keep DECA front and center is essential. You will benefit from having an arsenal of marketing resources to:

- Include in an initial email to introduce the opportunity.
- Send a thank you email or provide a leave behind at a meeting.
- Share at an in-person meeting or present in a virtual meeting.
- Approach your prospective partners through multiple channels (email, PPT, flyers, website links, videos).

This is a great opportunity to use Adobe Express to create marketing materials you can use for a specific meeting, event, or that are evergreen and can be used throughout the school year to promote partnership and sponsorship opportunities with your chapter or chartered association.

DECA Inc. has outreach flyers, email and messaging templates, and PowerPoint slides that may be customized to meet the needs of your chapter. Keeping your marketing and communications consistent and on brand will gain the attention of business partners and sponsors.

CHAPTER PARTNERSHIP PACKET

ADVISOR RESOURCE CENTER

ADOBE EXPRESS

PARTNERSHIP + SPONSORSHIP OUTREACH CHECKLIST

- Access the partnership development resources in the Advisor Resource Center
- Make changes and customize tools based on your goals, levels of membership and outreach needs
- Identify target organizations, businesses and community partners, with an aim to meet the needs of the chapter and partners/sponsors
- Document the ways different industry and community partners and sponsors may engage with your chapter and how they will benefit
- Work with your chapter to develop your sales pitch – what is DECA, why they should partner or sponsor, what is the call to action?
- Develop an outreach plan, including assigning responsibilities, sourcing needed marketing materials, determining outreach methods, and creating follow-up plans
- Create a communications strategy to keep your partners and sponsors engaged and informed of your chapter activities and successes



partner@deca.org