

ACTIVITIES

SECTION 3

Company Tours

Beyond occasionally visiting parents at work, many students have very little idea about the day-to-day rhythms and requirements of the workplace. Providing opportunities for students to tour your workplace helps them gain a firsthand understanding of the world of work, as well as the technologies and skills employees use in STEM-related jobs.

What Is a Company Tour?

A company tour is an activity that brings students to a workplace to learn more about a company and its industry, observe employees in their normal work routines, and ask questions of employees. During the tour, employees can demonstrate the equipment and technology they use on an everyday basis while highlighting the core skills and knowledge they apply in their jobs.

Company tours can include both walking tours of the workplace and sit-down presentations by employees about their work. Many employers also include lunch as part of the program, with students joining employees in the cafeteria or for a brown-bag discussion. Tours can include student groups of any size, but employers might consider breaking large groups into two or more smaller ones to facilitate more one-on-one interaction between students and employees.

Schools or teachers can initiate company tours by reaching out to local employers. Companies can also initiate them by offering tours to schools in their communities. Tours can be for students at all grade levels, from elementary through high school.

The Benefits of Company Tours

Benefits for the student:

- Students get to see an actual workplace and get a firsthand feel for what it's like to work in the employer's industry.
- Students meet with professionals and gain real-world insights into jobs and careers in the STEM fields.
- Students gain a fresh appreciation of how workers use the STEM skills they are learning in class every day.

Benefits for the employer:

- Employers have the opportunity to nurture student interest in jobs and careers with their company and in their industry.
- Employers can help students understand the education and skills they need to secure jobs with their companies.
- Employers advance their reputation as supporters of education and community leaders among school leaders, teachers, parents, and students.

Benefits for the employee/presenter:

- Employees have an opportunity to connect with local students and reflect on their jobs, their careers, and the skills they use every day.
- Employees gain valuable experience in public speaking and in serving as ambassadors for their companies and industries.
- Employees increase their job satisfaction after connecting with youth in their communities.

Making It Effective and Educational

BEFORE THE TOUR

Coordinate with the school or teacher about logistics. Establish contact with the school or the classroom teacher so you understand their expectations and requirements. Here are some logistical questions to discuss:

- How long should we schedule for the tour? (Note that student tours often last for 60 to 90 minutes; for longer tours, you might want to include more breaks for Q&A time, hands-on activities and other opportunities to break out of the mode of “talking at” the students.)
- How many students will be on the tour? How many teachers and other adults?
- Can the tour include lunch?

During your up-front communications with the school or teacher, make sure they have the information they need to make the visit a success, including:

- Where to park/what entrance to use;
- Where you will meet them;
- What safety requirements students and adults on the tour will have to follow;
- What students and teachers should wear (are your facilities cold/hot?);
- What else to bring (bag lunches, water, etc.).

Choose the route. Some parts of your company may be clearly off limits to visitors. Decide well in advance what parts of your facility are both accessible and interesting to young visitors.

Play it safe. Depending on the nature of your company and its operations, opening the doors to a student group may require you to follow important safety precautions. See “Safety Checklist for Student Tours,” below, for more on how to make the tour a safe experience for all.

Connect it to the classroom. Find out who the students are and what they are learning *right now* in the class that is relevant to the company's operations and what its employees do on a day-to-day basis. Questions for the school or teacher include:

- What is the background of the students in the class? What do they already know about STEM jobs or STEM careers?
- Are there any questions about STEM jobs or careers the students should be able to answer after the tour?
- What are students currently learning in their math and/or science classes? What general topics seem to excite them? What topics are they struggling with?
- Are there plans to have students report or reflect on what they have learned from the company tour? How can the company tour lay the groundwork for this reflection?

Answers to these questions can help you structure a tour that best meets the schools and students' needs.

For other tips on questions to ask teachers and schools, see "How Can You Put the 'Learning' in Work-Based Learning?" page 6.

Line up a variety of employees to speak to students. One employee may end up leading the tour, but make sure to involve other workers so students have a complete picture of the variety of jobs and careers in your company and your industry. Make sure featured employees represent different aspects of the company's work, different skill sets and educational backgrounds, as well as diversity in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. Young employees can be especially good at connecting with youth.

Be sure to prep all employees who will be presenting to the students so they understand their roles. Consider sharing some of the presentation tips and pointers offered elsewhere in this guide with all employees who will be participating in the tour. See Section 2: Classroom Visits, page 21, and "How Do You Connect With Young People," page 8, for more on effective presentations.

Coordinate with communications. Let your communications department know that the tour is scheduled. Discuss possible photo ops and inviting media. Depending on the size and scope of the tour, inviting a reporter might be an opportunity to showcase the partnership your company has with the school. Be sure to also coordinate this with the school. If you want to post or share images or information about individual students who participated, work with the school to secure photo releases. Schools and businesses need parental consent to post or share images of minors. Additionally, circulate internal communications to make on-site staff aware of the tour and opportunities to connect with students.

Organize hands-on activities if possible. Think about how to get students involved in your company's work in a more direct way. Can they give some of the equipment a test run? Can they create an artifact of your company's product to take home? Can they get their hands on some of the raw materials that go into your products? Of course, safety should be your primary concern when creating opportunities for students to experience your company's operations in a more direct way. See "Safety Checklist for Student Tours," below, for more on how to play it safe.

Schedule a lunch or water/snack break. If students are going to be on site for more than an hour or two, talk to the school or teacher about including lunch or a snack break on the agenda. This might be an opportunity for students to sit briefly with employees and talk in a more casual way about their jobs.

DURING THE TOUR

Welcome students with a quick orientation. Invite students to gather in a conference room or other large space for a quick overview of the company and its industry, history and operations, as well as any safety tips they need to know. Discuss how many people work for the company, and provide a quick overview of the various types of jobs they hold, as well as what STEM skills they have to apply in those jobs. Give the students a preview of what they are going to see on the tour. Consider using a brief (no more than three-minute) video or slide presentation as part of the orientation. And make sure to point out where restrooms and water are as part of your orientation.

Showcase cool technology and equipment. Have employees demonstrate some of the technology and equipment they use on a day-to-day basis during the tour. This could include lab equipment and other machinery, computer and video systems, and more. The more state-of-the-art, the better. Make sure to explain what skills employees need to operate the equipment, as well as how the equipment helps them do their jobs.

Be prepared with answers. Make sure all employees are prepared to talk with students about the following topics:

- What is your job with the company?
- What was your pathway to the job? What did you study in school, and what level of education do you have?
- What were your plans when you were the age of the young people on the tour?
- What is it like to do your work (including a description of your typical day and your responsibilities)?
- What are the educational and skill requirements for people in your position? For others in the company and the industry?
- What are some of the skills you apply on the job on an everyday basis, including math, science, writing, and communications?
- How much do you work alone, and how much do you work as part of a team?

Save time for Q&A. Both during the tour and after the tour, make sure to open things up to questions from the students. Create Q&A moments throughout the tour as the students encounter different aspects of the company operations and as they talk with different employees. Remember: almost every question is a good question.

Make an impression. Leave students with an exciting picture of what it is like to work at your company, and make sure they understand what skills, degrees, or certifications they need to enter a career in your industry.

Provide takeaway materials and freebies. Make sure you have attractive, informative materials to share about your company, including brochures and other handouts students can take home. Avoid highly technical materials or materials that are full of jargon. Can you share an example or artifact of a company product? Consider putting those materials in a gift bag for each student, along with company freebies such as notepads, pens, or other giveaway items.

Following Up

Evaluate it. In your follow-up contacts with the school, evaluate whether the classroom visit met the school's goals and your goals. For more ideas on evaluation, see "How Can You Put the 'Learning' in Work-Based Learning?" page 6.

Think about what's next. Speak with the school or teacher about offering follow-up activities to give students an even closer look at your company and jobs in your industry, such as job shadowing and other activities explored elsewhere in this guidebook.

Telling the Story

Internally

Write it up. Consider writing up an account of the tour for your company's intranet, newsletter, or other employee-focused publication. Get quotes from the teacher or students. Emphasize the value of speaking with and inspiring young people in STEM careers. If the event is covered by local media, include that in your write up.

Externally

Send a press release. Determine, with your company's communications department and the school's, whether it makes sense to send a press release or coordinate with media outlets about the visit. Again, if you are sharing images or information about students, make sure you coordinate with the school to obtain the proper releases.

Share on social media. Coordinating with your communications department, live tweet the visit or post a series of photos to Instagram or your company's other social media accounts. After the visit, send the school a tweet, Facebook post, and/or Instagram photo from your company, thanking them for visiting. If you have personal social media accounts and your company's communications policy allows for it, consider using those accounts to tell the story during or after the visit. Involve your communications department to strike the most appropriate tone for these communications.

Resources

Safety Checklist For Student Tours

- ✓ Coordinate with your company's security office about identification requirements and badging, as well as other policies for visitors.
- ✓ Ensure that none of the tour occurs in areas that are off-limits to visitors.
- ✓ Make sure all students and adults on the tour receive relevant safety instruction.
- ✓ Advise all tour participants about the "rules of the road" for the tour—no wandering off, wear safety equipment as appropriate, etc.
- ✓ Provide necessary safety gear for all participants—eye goggles, earplugs, hard hats, gloves, etc.

Please see "What Logistical Issues Should We Be Thinking About?" on page 11 for more considerations about enlisting the help of your security office and other company personnel long before the tour.