

ACTIVITIES

SECTION 6

Job Shadows

Job shadows introduce students to the realities of today's workplace and the skills they need to succeed, while providing employees with an enriching opportunity to share their hard-won knowledge and experience.

What Are Job Shadows?

Job shadows give students an opportunity to follow a working professional during a day or more of typical work activities. Students can benefit from “exploratory” or “extended” job shadows:

- In an exploratory job shadow, students come to the workplace to shadow a professional for a short period of time (typically 4–8 hours).
- Extended job shadow experiences can last several days or even weeks and offer students a more-in-depth look at an employee’s responsibilities and daily work. Students in extended job shadows are not expected to perform actual work functions as in an internship. However, job-shadowing students are sometimes compensated for their time.

In both cases, the job shadow experience can be supplemented with other activities aimed at educating the student about an employer and its industry. Job shadows are an activity aimed at high school students who are beginning to think about college and careers.

Job shadows can happen on an individual basis, with one student visiting a workplace alone. Alternatively, schools and employers can arrange for group job shadowing events, where several students spend time at an employer’s worksite and participate in both group activities and one-on-one job shadow experiences with employees. Coordinators at participating schools and companies work together match students with professionals who work in areas that are most likely to interest them.

The Benefits of Job Shadows

Benefits for the student:

- Students have a chance to learn firsthand how employees apply skills and knowledge to accomplish important work tasks and solve problems.
- Students have the opportunity to interact with their job shadow host, colleagues and clients and see teamwork and 21st-century job skills in action.
- Students learn more about careers in the fields they may be interested in pursuing.
- Students learn about the rhythm and requirements of the workplace, in areas from punctuality and dress to norms and behavior.
- Students gain a valuable experience for college and work resumes.

Benefits for the employer:

- Employers provide students with an up-close look at job and career opportunities in their industry.

- Employers spark student interest in careers in the industry while showcasing their commitment to furthering the education and development of young people.
- Employers also demonstrate to students in an in-depth way the importance of developing and honing key skills that will serve them well in the workplace.

Benefits for the employee/volunteer:

- Employees have an opportunity to reflect on their work and the key skills that make them effective, and to share their knowledge and experience.
- Employees gain valuable mentoring experience and greater job satisfaction by creating an enriching experience for students.

Making It Effective and Educational

BEFORE THE JOB SHADOW

Play it safe. Depending on the nature of your company and its operations, opening the doors to students may require you to follow important safety precautions. See “Safety Checklist for Job Shadows,” below, for more on how to make the job shadow a safe experience for participating students.

Coordinate with the partner school or organization. Maintain contact with the teacher or school so you know their requirements and expectations. Ask what students are doing in class that could be reinforced during the job shadow experience. For example:

- What is the background of the students attending the job shadow? What do they already know about STEM jobs or STEM careers?
- What are the students currently learning in their math and/or science classes? What general topics seem to excite them? What topics are they struggling with?
- Do the students need help with specific “soft” skills like communication or teamwork?
- Are there plans to have students report or reflect on what they have learned from the job shadow? What can you do during the job shadow to lay the groundwork for this reflection?

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

Make sure students are prepped. Provide the teacher or school with links/materials so students come to the job shadow with a basic understanding of the company and industry. Advise the school that students should practice good professional behaviors by calling the worksite a day in advance to confirm the meeting time and place.

Coordinate with Communications. Let your communications department know that the job shadow is scheduled. Discuss possible photo ops and the appropriateness of inviting media. Depending on the size and scope of the job shadow opportunity, 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.

WELCOMING THE STUDENTS

Start with who you are. Describe your job and the education and experiences that helped prepare you for your current position.

Paint a quick picture of the company. Share an overview of your company including your products and services and organizational structure. Keep this at a very high level. There is no need for a long presentation; more detail about the company and industry will likely emerge in the course of the job shadow.

Keep safety first. Include a standard workplace safety presentation to ensure the student understands how to respond in the event of an emergency.

Take a tour. Lead the student on a brief tour of the workplace and explain the roles of different people and departments in the company's success. Make sure to point out emergency exits, restrooms and availability of water/refreshments during the tour.

DURING THE JOB SHADOW

Don't make it all about you. Make sure to stimulate a two-way conversation by asking the student questions about his/her own interests and goals: Here are some suggested open-ended questions to ask the student:

- What are your favorite subjects in school?
- Do you have your sights set on specific career?
- What education do you want to pursue after high school, and what would you want to study?
- Why did you want to participate in this job shadow?

Help them understand what you do. Describe your responsibilities and demonstrate what your job is like on a daily basis:

- Help the student understand specific skills and knowledge required to perform your job. Be sure to stress the importance of communication skills, collaboration, teamwork, creative thinking and problem-solving skills.

- Show the student a variety of material you are expected to read and understand in your job (executive briefings, technical manuals, WebEx meetings, instant messaging, internal memos, group emails, government directives, for example).
- Show the student the most interesting aspects of your work. Don't hide it if you have to perform mundane tasks in your job or spend long hours sitting at a desk, but be sure to show students the parts of your job that excite you the most. What taps your creativity? What challenges must you solve? How is what you do important to society? Seeing this kind of work firsthand can inspire young people to follow in your footsteps.

Introduce the student to other employees. Seek opportunities to connect the student to coworkers with different job responsibilities. Showcase entry-level, mid-career and senior-level positions to demonstrate career development opportunities within your company. If possible, choose a racially and gender-diverse group of coworkers. Lunch can be a good opportunity for students to hear from coworkers about their jobs.

Give them something to do. Job shadows can give students a rare opportunity for hands-on experience of what a STEM professional does every day. Is there equipment a student can safely operate? Design software she can explore? A real-world problem she can weigh in on? A collaborative problem-solving meeting she can witness? Employees should look for creative ways to make the experience more memorable by giving students a taste of an authentic work experience.

Talk about performance assessment. Explain how your performance goals are established and how your performance is measured. Here are some suggested open-ended questions to ask the student:

- How do your teachers explain what is expected of you?
- How is your performance measured?
- If students discuss standardized testing, share courses and tests you take to maintain certifications or progress in your career.

Give them something to take home. Share information and materials from your marketing department and college recruiters about your company and career possibilities.

Following Up

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

Look for a thank you note. Job shadow hosts should expect to receive a follow-up thank you note from participating students. If you do not receive a note in a timely fashion, it may be worth contacting an adult coordinating the job shadows to remind him that a follow-up note is an important part of work-based learning.

Remember: Do not contact students directly. If you need to reach out to students for any reason, always do so through the teacher or school.

Consider staying in touch. Perhaps students can come back at a later time for a follow-up job shadowing experience. In addition, consider offering ongoing mentoring and college and career guidance to students as appropriate, while following company guidelines on communicating with students, especially minors.

Telling the Story

Internally

Write it up. Consider writing up an account of the job shadow for your company's intranet, newsletter, or other employee-focused publication. Get quotes from the students and employees who participated. 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 job shadow. Again, if you are sharing images or information about students, make sure you coordinate with the school and obtain the proper releases.

Share on social media. Coordinating with your communications department, live tweet the job shadow or post a series of photos to Instagram to your company's social media account. After the visit, send a tweet, Facebook post, and/or Instagram photo from your company to the school, thanking them for visiting to learn more about the company and STEM careers. 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 Job Shadows

- ✓ Coordinate with your company's security office about identification requirements and badging, as well as other policies for visitors.
- ✓ Make sure all students participating in the job shadow receive relevant safety instruction.
- ✓ Advise all participants about the "rules of the road"—no wandering off, wear safety equipment as appropriate, etc.
- ✓ Where necessary, provide 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 your security office and other company personnel long before the job shadow.

Sample Job Shadow Agenda and Timeline

The following sample agenda and timeline reflect proposed activities based on a group job shadow experience. This can easily be modified to use when hosting an individual student for a job shadow.

Job Shadow Sample Agenda

- 8:00 **Students arrive at your facility**
Volunteers greet students and manage security and badging process.
- 8:15 **Escort students to conference room**
Volunteers escort students to conference room and help make them comfortable. Light refreshments can be available.
- 8:30 **Welcome and Company Overview**
Invite a senior executive to welcome the students and teachers to your company. Provide a brief overview of the company, including your products and services.
- Note: Remind your executive they will be talking to students so the overview should be brief. It will be helpful if they can highlight some of the career opportunities available in your company.*
- 8:45 **Tour**
If possible, break into small groups of 5-8 for the tours. This will allow the students and teachers to have more dialogue with the employees conducting the tours.
- 9:15 **Reconvene in conference room**
Students and teachers join their individual job shadow hosts.
- 10:00 **Individual Job Shadows**
Employees host students and teachers in their workplace.
- 12:45 **Reconvene in conference room**
Invite a senior executive to thank the students and teachers for visiting your facility. Distribute gift bags (if available) and escort students back to buses.
- 1:00 **Students depart**