New Visions for Public Schools
Characteristics of Lead and Collaborating Partners in the New Century High Schools

Lead Partners

Partners in the New Century High Schools Initiative play increasingly diverse and important roles. While each New Century high school has its own identity, they all combine rigorous academic programs with innovative teaching, personalized learning environments and deep ties to the local community. Each school is a collaborative effort between educators and partner organizations, who work together on every aspect of the school’s design and operation.

Lead partners in the New Century High Schools Initiative take on a new role in schools as their work is integrated into the life of the school on multiple levels in order to impact student development and outcomes. This calls for a paradigm shift for both the Department of Education and lead partner staff as lead partners are no longer simply providing supplementary services in schools.

This guide has been developed to help you decide if the role of lead partner is the right one for your organization. We encourage organizations that are not able to commit to the role of lead partner, or for-profit organizations that want to contribute to New Century high schools, to consider becoming collaborating partners (Please see Characteristics of Collaborating Partners).

Though challenging and time consuming, the role of lead partner can be extremely rewarding for an organization. Lead partners have the opportunity to do more than just offer services: they participate in a collaborative effort that is fundamentally changing the lives of thousands of students. Lead partners participate in a highly recognized national education reform movement and formally manage a limited four year grant on behalf of the school that partially pays for their involvement and support of the school. Lead partner organizations have found that the role allows them to build on their strengths as an organization, has provided opportunities for collaborating both within and outside their organizations, and has allowed them to enhance their mission.

Responsibilities of Lead Partners

- Manage grant funds on behalf of the school for four years
- Maintain accounting records of funds
- Work with schools in budget development
- Participate in school planning and implementation
- Share in the accountability of school outcomes

Essential Characteristics

- 501(c)(3) organization
- Financially sound
- Audited annually
- Experience in managing public and private grant funds and the capacity to dispense those funds regularly and flexibly to accommodate the needs of a new school.
- A commitment to youth, education, and positive student outcomes.
- Ability to dedicate/assign staff to be active participants in the planning and implementation of the school
- Expertise that can significantly contribute to teaching, learning and student support in the school

**Characteristics of Successful Lead Partner Organizations**

**Ability to offer resources and expertise that make a significant contribution to student learning, development and post secondary school preparation:**

Lead partners function in many different ways and offer many types of resources to contribute to the school’s mission. Focusing on integration into various aspects of the school, the lead partners contribute to curriculum development, professional development, program development, extended day opportunities, school governance and student support services. Successful partners have the resources to make a tangible and significant contribution to students and are committed to providing those resources. Lead partners have a long term investment in the school, even after the initial grant expires.

**A connection to the community:**

Lead partners often have long-term relationships in particular communities and are trusted by people in that community. They know the issues that are important to the community and are able to engage community members, particularly parents, in activities designed to strengthen the school and forge relationships between the school and its surrounding communities.

**Commitment to youth development:**

Successful partnerships emphasize positive youth development as a central goal and work to provide the programs and environments that support it. Youth development is best facilitated when organizations focus on young people’s strengths and assets. Research has shown that programs effectively promote youth development when they provide meaningful and engaging opportunities for young people to participate in activities that influence the world around them, provide consistent, affirming and ongoing relationships, physical and psychological safety, high standards and expectations, and guidance and affirmation.

**Commitment to partnership planning and implementation:**

School partnerships require a long term commitment from all parties involved, and lead partners should be prepared to dedicate significant amounts of staff time to the school partnership. School planning teams meet at least weekly during the planning phase of the school and the most successful lead partners provide an on site staff person that serves as a liaison between the school and the organization. Many lead partners provide several full and part-time staff members at the school.

**A strong commitment to providing resources and working with the school to raise funds:**
Successful partners are committed to providing human, economic, and material resources to the school. The four year New Century grant supports some aspects of the partner’s involvement with the school. However, partners are responsible for fundraising for school partnership programs after the initial grant, in partnership with the school, and lead partners are most successful when they are committed to raising additional funds.

**Collaborating Partners**

Community partners are an integral part of the New Century high schools. Among other functions, they open schools to the larger community, enhance school learning, and offer needed services and expertise. Each New Century high school has a lead partner organization that participates actively in the daily activities of the school, manages school grant funds, and makes a financial and programmatic commitment to the school. Along with a lead partner, the schools have one or more collaborating partners that also support and enhance the mission of the school. Both types of partnerships offer organizations the opportunity to become involved in a nationally recognized reform effort that is transforming urban high schools. Partners are given the opportunity to make a substantial impact in the lives of young people, one that goes well beyond offering a discrete service or program.

Collaborating partners enter into agreements with schools to provide specific resources, programs, and services to students. Collaborating partners are key players in supporting student development and achievement. Collaborating partners can be nonprofit or for-profit organizations, and several businesses have had valuable partnerships with schools. They can take advantage of initiative funds to support their partnerships and they often participate in the school planning process to create schools.

In the first year of the New Century High Schools Initiative, a diverse collection of organizations partnered with small schools. In the past year, all of the collaborating partnerships we have observed have at least one of the characteristics listed in this document and most have several. One element that is consistent throughout all of the successful partnerships is that the relationship is built on the strengths of both the school and the organization and both benefit due to the partnership.

**Important Characteristics of Collaborating Partners**

**Ability to draw on the skills and knowledge of staff members within the organization to enrich learning at the school:**

Collaborating partners’ staff members often enhance the school curriculum with their skills and knowledge. Students are able to tie what they are learning in their classes to the world outside of the school. For example, at one New Century high school, a major medical institution enhances a New Century high school’s science curriculum through frequent visits by its medical staff and guided tours of its medical facilities. Through the partnership students learn about medical science from experts in the field.
Capacity to offer resources to the school:
Along with staff, collaborating partners also offer other types of resources to schools to improve the learning environments of the New Century high schools. This may mean simply offering a physical space which the school can use for performances, donations of materials to support the curriculum, or guided tours at cultural institutions.

A strong connection to the community:
Many collaborating partner organizations are organizations that have strong connections to their communities. They have long standing relationships with the community and knowledge of the issues and people that affect it. These partners help connect schools to their local communities, allowing students to become more involved in- and to develop a sense of pride and connection to- the place they live. At one school, students partner with a local CBO that is engaged in local environmental advocacy. Through the partnership, students participate in an environmental study of their community, learning about environmental science and about the environmental issues that are affecting them and their community.

Ability to prepare students for future careers:
Collaborating partners often draw on their expertise in their field to prepare students for future employment opportunities. One school’s lead partner connects the school to several collaborating partner organizations within the sports industry. These organizations, including professional teams and sport management companies, offer students career mentoring and internships.

Ability to offer needed services to students:
Students in the communities served by New Century high schools sometimes go without important services, especially health care. Collaborating partners often work to fill this gap. At a Brooklyn high school, a health organization offers medical services to students through their mobile van. Other collaborating partners offer counseling and mentoring.

Ability to assist schools in developing a college culture in the school:
New Century high schools often collaborate with institutions of higher learning to prepare students for post-secondary school opportunities. One school in the Bronx has taken advantage of relationships with colleges to provide college visits for nearly all of its students. They have used these partnerships to develop a strong college culture in the school beginning in the 9th grade, where students are aware of the benefits of college and what they have to do to prepare themselves.