

MENTORED INDUSTRY PROJECTS: OVERVIEW

Mentored industry projects provide authentic learning experiences in which students connect with industry mentors to address challenges and solve problems in a community or industry. Industry mentors guide project work, offering feedback and direction throughout the project process. Students develop skills through professional interactions and understand connections between classroom content and their career aspirations. They can count as a [Career Preparation activity](#) as long as they are 40+ hours.

- **Industry Partners** shape the development of the Mentored Industry Project and serve as the central point of guidance for students.
- **Educators** act as facilitators for these experiences, providing assistance to students in the classroom and room for exploration and skill development.
- **Students** work in designated teams, considering the project challenge from a team-based approach.

While course content prepares students for this work, integration of work-based learning activities provides opportunities to connect with mentors and address challenges within their community.

Mentored Industry Projects Outcome and Objectives: During the Mentored Industry Project Process, students engage with professionals in an authentic way to solve community or industry challenges. Consider the following objectives as you work with your team to plan Mentored Industry Project implementation.

- Students build skills and connections through project work and interaction with community partners.
- Students connect previous learning and work-based learning experiences to solve challenges impacting their community and selected industry.
- Students understand connections between classroom content, their industry, and applied skills used to successfully complete the Mentored Industry Project.

FUTURE READY SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Mentored Industry Projects provide a unique opportunity for students to develop and practice skills while interacting with industry professionals. Consider the following [Future Ready Skills](#) as you plan Mentored Industry Projects with your students.

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Problem Solving
- Initiative & Self-Direction
- Social Awareness
- Planning for Success



Best Practice: Prior to starting the Mentored Industry Project, have students complete the [Skills Self-Assessment](#) to better understand their skills and skill development opportunities. This aids in student confidence while working with identified professionals and engaging with peers during the project process.

RECRUITING MENTORED INDUSTRY PROJECT PARTNERS

Prior to project implementation, gather a group of professionals who will serve as challenge providers and mentors during the Mentored Industry Project process. Consider the following as you recruit mentors:

- **Advisory Board and/or Community Partners** who are already involved in your Academy: Involved partners provide a great start and additional connections to mentors.
- **Number of Mentors:** Suggested ratio of 3-4 students to 1 mentor. Consider how many students will participate in the project.
- **Convert an existing [CTSO \(or other\) project](#)** to a Mentored Industry Project. Have mentors inform the CTSO project and competition preparation process.
- **Reach out to local businesses** that connect with your Academy Program of Study and theme.

IMPLEMENTING A MENTORED INDUSTRY PROJECT

Project Elements

Project Timeline

Mentored Industry Project timelines are flexible and can take many forms to fit unique student, partner, and educator needs. To meet the minimum 80-hour (or two 40-hour) Mentored Industry Project requirements, approach planning strategically considering the following:

- Consider Mentored Industry Project implementation strategy: As a best practice, it is recommended that Mentored Industry Projects be implemented during existing classes. If implemented as an extra-curricular activity, ensure planning accounts for time outside of school hours for both mentors and students to successfully complete project needs.
- Consider a best fit for the Mentored Industry Project as it relates to courses, other work-based learning activities, and career readiness opportunities. Ensure students are ready for partner engagement and understand using this process as a skill development and networking opportunity.

Mentor Check-Ins

Scheduling regular mentor check-ins is key to mentored industry project success. Plan these check-ins during your overall project planning in regular intervals to encourage ongoing communication and project mentoring. Check-ins are short connection points between students and professionals that take around 30 minutes each. Consider the following when building in mentor check-ins to the project process:

- **Respect time of partners:** Offer multiple approaches to check-ins. This can include options to check-in via email, video call, or in-person. These meetings should be fitting for both the partner and student, meeting both project and time needs.
- **Frequency of mentor check-ins:** A minimum of 3-4 check-ins (including a kick-off meeting and final presentation meeting) are recommended during the project process. Many of these meetings can be tied to existing WBL activities if they involve the same partners or can occur as standalone events. Consistency is key in developing the mentor/mentee relationship.
- **Empowering students:** Empower students to take charge of their project needs and mentoring check-in time. Suggestions toward this include student made agendas and check-in questions, preparing students for interaction with partners, and frequent debriefs about the mentoring process.
- **Preparing mentors:** Prior to engaging in the mentored industry project, prepare mentors for working with students. This includes giving an overview of mentor expectations, project parameters, and general guidance detailing best practices around working with student groups. Provide support throughout the project as needed for both mentors and mentees to be successful.

Final Presentation Preparation

Make the final presentation a celebration of work and the mentor relationships established during project implementation. Begin planning the final presentation early during project implementation, preparing both mentors and students. Engage the Advisory Board and partners in this planning to best showcase student work.

Evaluation

Mentors complete the [Future Ready Skills Assessment](#) in relation to the final project to provide industry-based feedback on student products. This assessment is completed for each individual student and counts towards the WBL Career Preparation Activity requirement for NAFTrack Certification. Share this assessment with both students and partners during the Mentored Industry Project process to ensure understanding and completion.