



Not Just the Lucky Few

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www.buildingbridgestocareers.org





Established in 1788, Marietta is the oldest city in the state of Ohio, and the first official American settlement territory north and west of the Ohio River. Located at the confluence of the Ohio and Muskingum rivers and known as the “Riverboat Town,” it is marked by the intricate pattern of brick streets, cascading flower-adorned lampposts, and the Victorian skyline of its downtown.¹

In spite of its early growth, Marietta was surpassed by other towns as new forms of transportation came to Ohio. Canals, the National Road, and the railroads made all parts of the state accessible. Since the last recession, Marietta, like towns across rural America, is struggling with declining populations, stagnant wages, rising opiate addiction, and lack of a skilled and productive workforce.

School-to-work transitions and the partnerships necessary to maintain them have become one of the primary strategies to address these challenges. **School to work transition means strategies, partnerships, programs, and processes that help prepare students for the future of work and learning.**

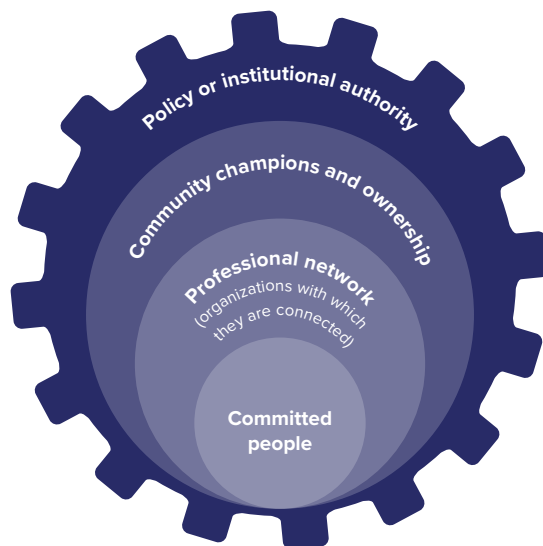
The story of **Building Bridges to Careers (BB2C)** in Marietta, Ohio is a case study in change, which is necessary and unique for **two** reasons.

1 School-to-work partnerships are difficult to maintain and tend to rely upon one person or a handful of people to maintain them, which often makes these collaborations unsustainable.

This story expands upon the importance of nurturing relationships in creating these types of partnerships, how they happen organically through networking, and how they can be sustainable and scalable.

BB2C is a story about the importance of effectively navigating the circles of engagement and scalability.

CIRCLES OF ENGAGEMENT & SCALABILITY



¹ About Marietta. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://mariettaohio.org/about-marietta/>



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The ability to sustain and scale school-to-work partnerships is tough anywhere, but extremely difficult in rural areas, which makes facing devastating economic times even more difficult.

This case study highlights examples of how these relationships can be successfully maintained in rural America.



BB2C'S PERSPECTIVE ON STUDENT STORY

“One of our student ambassador’s families had some financial hardship, and they didn’t think they would be able to send the student to college. BB2C was able to provide a list of resources (e.g., financial aid paperwork for special circumstance). The student ended up switching colleges and is currently a sophomore on the dean’s list. BB2C experiences provided the student and his family the opportunity to discuss and make decisions around his schooling and career path, which helped him to select a college.”

—Tonya Davis, BB2C Coordinator

THE CHALLENGE

Businesses worldwide report a severe shortage of skilled workers even though more than 70 million young adults are looking for jobs. According to McKinsey, the global economy could face a potential surplus of 90 million–95 million low-skill workers and a shortage of 38–40 million high-skill workers by 2020.²

Today’s employers are searching for soft skills, including communication and leadership.

But, they are not finding them. The skills gap is obvious—as is the perceptions gap between employers, educators, and students. According to McKinsey, 70 percent of education providers believe their graduates are prepared for work, but less than 50 percent of youth and employers agree. Students do not believe their education increases their chances of getting a job and don’t see the classroom as a relevant place to prepare for a job. Employers are saying jobs are available, but graduates aren’t prepared. With teachers buckling down to address state initiatives, the gap between education and employment becomes more difficult to address and remains a problem to be solved.³

In addition to a skills gap, we have another major problem—a communication gap. Schools and businesses are not collaborating, and in many cases, are operating completely independent of one another. Schools should be asking businesses what employable skills students need, and businesses should be asking schools what they need to better prepare students for life and career. Local businesses need to clearly communicate their workforce needs, gaps, and opportunities. Additionally, businesses, education institutions, and government at all levels must form partnerships to support and inform the development of curriculum, credentialing programs, and work-based learning experiences.⁴

Schools that engage community and business leaders can create an exchange of information. Teachers will develop an understanding about career readiness, aspiration, and local career options for students. Community members have the opportunity to learn about the inner workings of education. The learning is reciprocal and can break down invisible barriers between the two types of organizations. Increasing interactions between school and community that impact children can improve school and community conditions (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2011; Cervone, 2010; Reeves, 2005), increase the effectiveness of school functions (Sanders, 2006), address economic and community development (Longo, 2007; Sanders, 2006), increase student achievement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005), and increase student engagement (Laursen, Liston, Thiry, & Graf, 2007; Welch & Billig, 2004).⁵

Communication among schools and businesses can help address another issue we’re facing today, which is that **many rural students believe they need to leave the area to obtain a successful career and well-paying job.** In reality, many opportunities exist in the area. According

² Barton, D., Farrell, D., & Mourshed, M. (2013, January). *Education to employment: Designing a system that works (Rep.)*. Retrieved <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/education-to-employment-designing-a-system-that-works>

³ Barton, D., Farrell, D., & Mourshed, M. (2013, January). *Education to employment: Designing a system that works (Rep.)*. Retrieved <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/education-to-employment-designing-a-system-that-works>

⁴ Ohio Governor’s Office of Workforce Transformation. (n.d.). *Regional Workforce Collaborations: Guidelines for Action*. Retrieved from [http://workforce.ohio.gov/Portals/0/FINAL_RWC_Guidelines for Action.pdf](http://workforce.ohio.gov/Portals/0/FINAL_RWC_Guidelines%20for%20Action.pdf)

⁵ Werry, T. K. (2016). *Increasing Shared Understandings between Educators and Community Members through Intentional Collaborative Interactions* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The Patton College of Education of Ohio University.

to the *Chronicle Review: The Rural Brain Drain*, the focus on pushing the most motivated students into four-year colleges must be balanced by efforts to match young people not headed for bachelor's degrees with training, vocational, and assorted associate-degree programs.

Matching high-school students not headed for university with vocational or community-college programs, and nurturing their interests while in high school through internships and training, will prepare them for the new economic growth areas.⁶ Such partnerships require close collaboration among business and civic leaders, elected officials, and secondary and community-college administrators who are accustomed to working in their own bureaucracies.

This intersection is where a school-to-work community organization, collaborative, or Regional Workforce Collaboration can be beneficial. **A collaborative effort can spark conversation around outcomes for students that lead to resources and experiences that promote academic rigor and the development of soft skills.** These regional collaborations are starting to develop across the country in communities of varying sizes, economic bases, and geographic areas. Interest in regional collaborations has grown as workforce development and the communities around them have become more complex. More and more schools, nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropy are interested in developing these collaborations.⁷

As a first step, these groups must actively collaborate on behalf of the area's young people to ensure they have the appropriate supports to reach important academic, career, and personal milestones for success. Rural communities face unique challenges, from higher numbers of children and families in poverty, geographic distance, lack of public transportation, limited financial resources and capital investments, and a lack of high-paying jobs in the region. Focusing on future readiness by building and supporting partnerships between education and businesses is even more important for rural communities to help reverse the "brain drain," overcome generational poverty, and make strides toward rural prosperity.

The challenges students and young adults face in transitioning from the education system to the workforce—and from the workforce to additional training and education opportunities—are significant in Ohio's Appalachian region. However, opportunities exist to leverage the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity within communities. Groups must recognize community assets and challenges to consider how best to develop a plan for action and more forward. Community assets include: population numbers, educational infrastructure, community organizations and institutions, and other regional assets.



An example of a successful school-to-work collaborative or regional workforce collaboration is **Building Bridges to Careers (BB2C)**, founded in 2012. Serving Washington and Athens Counties in Ohio and beginning to work with Wood County in West Virginia, BB2C is comprised of education, community, and business leaders who work collaboratively to address their goal of creating a K–12 college- and career-readiness continuum. After assessing the level at which the community was working together to impact career readiness, BB2C built and continues to build programs, events, and networks to address skills and communication gaps. This case study explores BB2C's concept and creation, program activities and impact, challenges, keys to success, and lessons learned.

⁶ Carr, P. J., & Kefalas, M. J. (2009, September 21). *The Rural Brain Drain*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Rural-Brain-Drain/48425>

⁷ Carr, P. J., & Kefalas, M. J. (2009, September 21). *The Rural Brain Drain*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Rural-Brain-Drain/48425>

ABOUT THE BB2C

THE SOLUTION TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN APPALACHIAN OHIO

The primary drivers in creating BB2C included Marietta City Schools, located in Washington County, an educational leader in Marietta City Schools who serves as the program's champion, Washington County Family and Children First (a partnership of state and local government, communities, and families), and a select number of local businesses and organizations.

The catalyst for developing the BB2C was the, *“realization that current programming needed to be expanded upon and something much larger needed to be created. The culture and climate surrounding education and college and career readiness (or lack thereof) could not be impacted by one- or two-chance opportunities for students. Too many were not being included in beneficial programs, and the schools needed a way to reach 100 percent of the students, not just the lucky few. The entire community had to get involved if this was going to make a difference.”* —Tasha Werry, BB2C Executive Director

TIMELINE

2006

Washington County Family and Children First conducted a needs assessment, which identified a deficit in knowledge around specific trades. At the same time, while serving on the Family and Children First Council, the Superintendent of Marietta City Schools became concerned about the number of area youth graduating high school without clear career pathways. This concern led to the creation of the Teen Career Awareness Initiative, a program that educated students and parents about well-paying job opportunities in the area and the education requirements for those jobs. However, as the program evolved, a disconnect remained for students who did not see how what they were learning in school would connect them with a job in the future.

2010

As an extension of college- and career-ready efforts, the Ohio Department of Education wanted to create 6–12 career pathways involving state entities, schools, families, and businesses through grant opportunities, such as Race to the Top (RttT). Marietta City Schools needed to make connections around career pathways and readiness. Washington County needed to keep young people in the area to build its talent pool, invite local companies into the schools, and provide tangible activities to make the connections.

2011

As a result of RttT-grant funds, a district communication plan was implemented, which included presenting to local civic groups and encouraging local community members to get involved. Through the connections made as a result of this communication campaign, several community members wanted to do more, and the idea of BB2C came to fruition. The Washington County Family and Children First agency already had experience with an initiative of this type (established in 2006) surveying graduating seniors, and developing programs, events, and projects that directly connected students to the experiences they need to choose pathways and increase their chances for success. Several other smaller entities/groups were working toward college and career awareness of some kind, but were not working together. Creating the BB2C community group was an attempt to coordinate, not duplicate, the county's career efforts.



2011

Districts participating in the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative (OAC, a partnership between 21 rural Appalachian districts and Battelle for Kids to design, implement, and support an innovative approach to transforming rural education) started taking a closer look at their college- and career-readiness (CCR) efforts.

Marietta City Schools developed a CCR strategic plan and started to rethink how they were preparing students for their futures beyond high school. Additionally, teachers, students, and parents expressed a desire to bring more career-related opportunities and technology into the classrooms. Local employers said they had job opportunities, but could not find qualified people locally to fill those positions.



2012

The OAC hosted a CCR Think Tank to better define CCR for OAC member districts. The think tank was comprised of OAC district representatives, local community organizations, higher education partners, and college- and career-readiness experts from across Ohio. The think tank produced the OAC's Strategic Plan tailored specifically for OAC districts and the unique challenges and opportunities of Appalachian districts.

2012

BB2C was founded to expand upon the career-awareness initiatives. The focus of this organization's work initially was on pulling the community together to address the growing disconnect.

Multiple perspectives were included over several years. The data collected and the community's opinions repeatedly pointed to the same problem—creating consensus through triangulation. BB2C's Tasha Werry noted, *“Every person we talk to is glad we are doing what we are doing to address this issue, and wishes someone had done this when they were in school.”*



BB2C'S PERSPECTIVE ON AURA'S STORY

“After meeting Aura in Upward Bound mock interviews, she impressed me so much that I asked her to be a student ambassador for the BB2C program. In working with her, I have seen her dedication to helping people, and she has been instrumental in assisting me with several projects such as our Job Shadowing Program and Family Career Awareness Day. She has worked with me to explore her career path through job shadowing and has helped others in her school to do so as well.”

—Tonya Davis, BB2C Coordinator

“My job shadowing experience that BB2C set up was a lifesaver, and really helped me realize the career path I thought I wanted, I no longer want to do.”

—Aura

CREATING THE BB2C

In 2012, initial partnerships occurred organically by inviting community members to attend an initial meeting and asking them to participate on a subcommittee. BB2C reached out to people with whom they already had established connections, identified large employers, influential community leaders (e.g., Memorial Hospital, Marietta College, Port Authority, banks, career centers), and partners (e.g., city officials and neighboring school districts) which the relationship would be mutually beneficial.

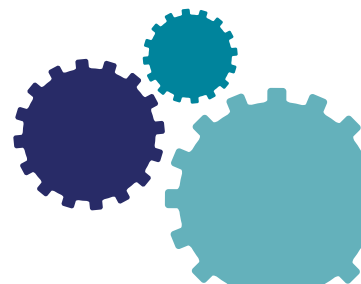
Initial outreach efforts

- **November 2011–February 2012:** Presentations to civic groups about the three federal grants Marietta City Schools was involved in and how a “conversation” could begin.
- **May 2012:** Initial community meeting and Marietta City Schools board meeting, which involved a panel discussion with the principal, superintendent, Solvay CEO, Chamber President, and a Battelle for Kids representative.
- **August 2012:** CCR Think Tank session, including community, business, and education representatives from multiple school districts; completed an assessment to determine the extent to which they were addressing CCR in schools.
- **August 2012:** BB2C committee was established and used Battelle for Kids’ CCR roadmap as a model to organize into subcommittees using the three pillars of CCR (academic preparation, accessibility, and aspiration). Subcommittee began to meet monthly.
- **August 2013:** Focus group to identify BB2C’s mission and vision hosted at Marietta College, and facilitated by an external organization.

BB2C, comprised of educators and community business and organizational representatives, worked with local residents and educators to determine a **PRIMARY GOAL: TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT.**

They defined the BB2C’s primary purpose as informing, connecting, and providing through a community network that:

1. Increases interactions between educators, students, parents, local organizations, and businesses, and
2. Engages students in a variety of community-based experiences, which connect their learning experience in schools to their surrounding communities in a wide variety of career fields to expand students’ awareness of education and career options and motivate them to create and attain their life goals.



PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

BB2C activities and interventions include:



Real-World Problem Scenarios Project

Through BB2C, Washington and Athens Counties in Ohio and Wood County in West Virginia created networks that connect teachers to local businesses to raise awareness of current local employment and career options and increase the amount of in-class career experiences that include local community adults from various careers. This professional development opportunity pairs teachers with a local business/ employer representative. Partners identify a real-world problem scenario that has already been solved from the business perspective that connects to the teacher's curriculum. The employer spends time in the classroom to help students develop solutions—a critical element that adds authenticity to the experience. During the three-year Problem Scenarios Project, more than 700 students spanning grades 3–12 worked with local business representatives to solve real-world problems and create videos to offer more teachers and students access to lessons.



Family Career Awareness Day

This annual event is designed to increase awareness and knowledge of potential career opportunities by showcasing local businesses to students and parents. The objective is to engage students in grades 7–12 and their parents, as 10 years of student surveys reveal that personal experience and parents have the most influence on a student's career decision. Families tour more than 50 employer displays together and talk with local employers about job types in the area and the paths to take to get those jobs.



Shadowing

Through this opportunity, students gain real-world knowledge of a career. Students go on site for a day during a four to six hour placement. They observe what a career in their field of interest entails to determine if that is a career they may want to pursue. Job shadowing offers students a chance to network and gain valuable information about necessary education or training while exposing them to a day in the life of that job or career.



High School Internship

This program is designed to provide Washington County high school students an experience that will complement their classroom learning and increase their soft skills. The internship is different than a part-time job because students are expected to reflect on the experience and use what they learned to determine a postsecondary pathway. Career awareness and development are the program's primary objectives.



Career Mentor Program

Getting career information to students earlier than high school is important because decisions made in middle school affect high school and what occurs after graduation. The Career Mentor Program connects local adult volunteers with middle school and high school students in classes, small groups, and as individuals. This program's goal is to help students develop decision-making skills that will aid them throughout the rest of their school years and help them choose a career path that fits their interests and needs. The Career Mentor Program is making measurable progress. BB2C began the program during the 2015–2016 school year with 18 mentors in one school. Today, the program includes 49 mentors in three districts and five schools in Washington County.



Career Pathway Stories

Making a decision about which career to pursue can be tough. Career Pathway Stories feature Washington County-area residents who have found great careers while living in the Mid-Ohio Valley. Career mentors, educational institutions, and others use the career pathway videos on the BB2C website to spark conversation with students about various ways to obtain a career. Each story describes the process a person went through to make his/her career decision. These stories are designed to inspire students and young adults to choose a career they will be proud of and enjoy.



Epicenter

The Building Bridges to Careers Epicenter is a comprehensive entrepreneurial education center—a “bricks and mortar” center for real-world work experiences that provides space and time for strategic collaboration. Small businesses housed in the Epicenter are supported in an incubator-style environment while they grow. These entrepreneurs-in-residence have agreed to work alongside high school and college students who collaboratively participate in programming to increase soft skills and explore different career paths. Students also experience what it is like to run their own business. BB2C expanded the Epicenter to include a “makerspace” (a community space where people come to create, invent, and learn) with learning labs.



Student Ambassadors

Recognizing the need to communicate directly and effectively with students, BB2C developed a Student Ambassador program. Student Ambassadors are recruited from participating high schools to spread the word about the career resources available through BB2C.

IMPACT

“In Marietta, you know that they begin exploring careers with students starting in kindergarten. One lady down there, she’s a saint. She put this whole program together, disrupted everything. You know what she does? When kids are little, she starts getting them to imagine what they want to be...They’re out there, and they’re working, and the businesses are involved, and the community is involved. We need more of it.”

–Governor John R. Kasich, April 2017 State of the State address

PRIMARY BENEFITS



Community (collaboration and cooperation)

- Better alignment and understanding of each other as entities (businesses have more understanding of education system, and teachers/administrators have a deeper understanding of businesses).
- Bringing education, business, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and other industries together to become stronger and more sustainable (e.g., the grassroots group met with Marietta City Schools Board of Education and advocated for a career-education position).



Students and Parents (valuable career information)

- Students and parents are engaging and connecting with businesses, which prepares them to make better employment choices/decisions about their next steps.
- Students are interested in innovative education experiences and connecting with people outside the classroom in real world experiences (e.g., job shadowing and other programs provide real-world results coming from networking and other opportunities).
- Providing opportunities for individuals who represent business to visit classrooms to share experiences and expose students to different career paths (e.g., family career day has 50–70 business volunteers) and employment opportunities in the region that don’t necessarily require college education (e.g., the welding program was almost eliminated until information was better communicated to students).



Business (economically beneficial)

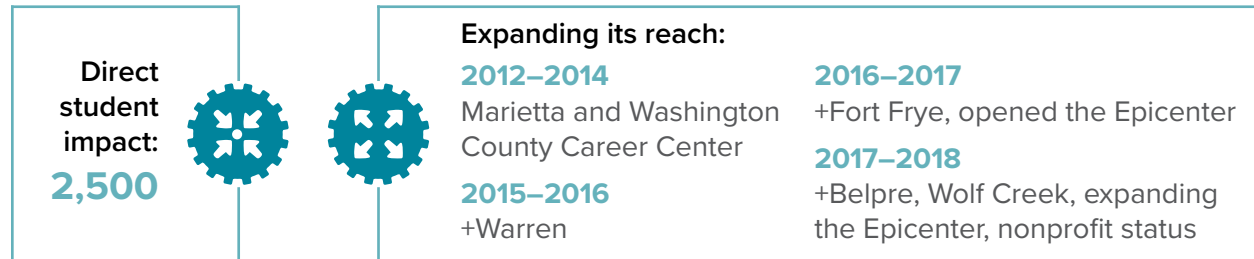
- Programming builds the workforce for local businesses because students are aware of opportunities and connected to the businesses (e.g., hospital established internship program).
- Businesses have the ability to provide real information about what is expected in the work place.



Education (supports schools and teachers)

- The effort supports the school district’s grade 6–12 career plan.
- Teachers benefit through access to online resources, credentialing, and a network of other teachers.

BY THE NUMBERS (2013–2017)



Desired Footprint

Successful Students

- Increase in students graduating with work-based learning experiences
- Students graduating with viable post-secondary plans
- Increase in graduation rates
- Decrease in student attrition from post-secondary schooling
- Increase school-to-work transition success rates

Prosperous Communities

- Reverse the brain drain
- Increase small business success through the small business incubator
- Develop a fully equipped community makerspace
- Increase access to the entrepreneurial ecosystem
- Increase innovation through multi-generational collaboration

BB2C collects quantitative and qualitative data for every project or program. That being said, attaching a single or a significant metric to the goal of “bridging the gap between education and employment” is difficult. They know how many participants engage in each project, and that interactions between the sectors (business, education, and community) have increased through these interactions. Anecdotal outcomes have been identified, but pulling together the data and pointing to one overarching metric is difficult. The Ohio Governor’s Office recognizes the difficulty these type of collaborations encounter in collecting data and identifying metrics stating, **“Solid metrics are often tough to find, and many partnerships are still in the very early stages of tracking outcomes and collecting and analyzing data.”**

Additionally, after collecting feedback from interviews of Ohio-based regional workforce collaborations the Governor’s Office indicated:

“There is a broad consensus that partners need to track students beyond K–12, ideally over at least a five-year period after high school graduation. What are students doing after high school? Are they in college or following some other career pathway? Are they employed? Have they been hired through the regional partnership? This data can be collected by simply contacting recent graduates to see where they are, what they are doing, and if they need any help. An alternative approach is to create a new, regional software portal accessible to school districts, students and businesses and that complements and integrates the OhioMeansJobs.com backpack.”

In response, BB2C states, **“We can get information about outcomes for the students in the districts we are serving (using the Department of Job and Family Services CCMEP program), but data is difficult to obtain about the students BB2C directly connects with through the schools. There would need to be staff whose job it is to collect this data, which doesn’t exist at this time.”**

CHALLENGES

BB2C has encountered a few challenges since its inception in 2012—and invests significant time building relationships to address these challenges.

“Relationships are key...we have to build them through repeated conversations, regular follow-up with our stakeholders, and include them in conversations and decisions when and where we can. If they don’t come to us, we go to them. Some relationships have taken years to develop (e.g., business, school, and community organizations), others take one chance meeting. We present to civic groups, we network continually, and we are constantly taking advantage of situations in which we can talk with someone. The necessary relationships are not built during regularly scheduled group meetings, they are built through individual discussions, one at a time.”

—Tasha Werry, BB2C Executive Director

One of the biggest challenges is boundary spanning, reaching across borders to build relationships. BB2C found that bringing business and education together was a struggle in the beginning, but the organization set the stage for collaboration and communication by hosting conversations to help businesses better understand the many state expectations and requirements of school systems. Over time, they’ve seen a change in businesses’ willingness to embrace schools and partner more. Additionally, they have experienced **implementation barriers working with various organizations and institutions and navigating systems that have their own structure, hierarchy, and bureaucracy.** They needed to learn how to operate within each, and it continues to be challenging when new organizations join the effort. Lastly, spanning the boundaries between school and the community for educational purposes was not a high priority for Washington County schools. However, BB2C continues to communicate with superintendents and principals in Washington County that they need only to take advantage of the BB2C’s support offered to increase the use of community resources in their districts. Principals and superintendents can avoid adding to their own responsibilities by encouraging their teachers to leverage the BB2C’s projects and events.

BB2C believes boundary spanning is crucial to successful collaboration and believes those connected to the work (organizations and individuals) should be boundary crossers. BB2C considered the question, **“How does a collaboration cultivate the boundary spanning mentality?”** and developed this list of qualities that promote boundary spanning:

1. Goal clarity (in this case, the student and student experience)
2. Ability to stay focused and not distracted by cultural or relationship challenges
3. Networking and a sense of mission that shouldn’t stop with “how” questions or “what if’s” that promote the idea of risk taking
4. Flexible agenda to follow opportunities
5. Reciprocity
6. Self-organizing or self-assembly
7. Continuous improvement (willing to share, learn, and improve)
8. Co-employment—A preferred strategy if BB2C is the place of employment for those who support the project; they identify people to serve as staff who can enhance their power (e.g., employees of school district, family and children first council, educational service center)

Another challenge BB2C encountered was **member participation**, such as the initial buy-in from business partners and keeping them engaged, teacher buy-in, and overcoming the initiative fatigue they were experiencing, and lack of county-wide involvement since initially only modest participation existed outside of Marietta. BB2C addressed these issues by formalizing a partner recruitment process (e.g., review membership annually, track attendance, and reach out to those absent from the conversation) and improving their approach to “selling” the program by showing the value to students, parents, and businesses. BB2C builds trust among partners—working as a team and creating an environment for others to feel comfortable sharing concerns and ideas.

BB2C is encountering additional obstacles that come with **rapid growth**. As BB2C continues to grow, the organization is cautious of not losing focus, staying true to the mission, and aligning to the work plan. They are taking advantage of new opportunities and developing programs valuable to all stakeholders, but ensuring they don’t dilute the program. Changes in the way BB2C operated occurred shortly after it developed the Epicenter with a location and became a non-profit with a governing board. Prior to this step, decisions about the directions of the projects and programs were typically made by a select few and driven by the organizations funding the projects. Once BB2C started receiving donations not tied to specific programs, establishing a fiscal advisory group was necessary. Lastly, BB2C needed to increase its programmatic and administrative support by employing a core staff to allow them to efficiently achieve goals and be impactful.

Another challenge is **communication**. BB2C has found that although asynchronous communication is good, it is not ideal. As a way to avoid lack of cohesion around the mission among their partners, BB2C provides the community with information to help them understand the mission and purpose and how the programs are connected and support the same goal. Additionally, BB2C communicates with educational leaders regularly to increase school engagement with the community. Partners should be mission-driven and have common goals; as new people come into the conversation, BB2C communicates its mission and history, clarifies priorities, and identifies and spreads its message.

A final challenge is **sustainability**—especially since the funding landscape is increasingly difficult. BB2C continues to search for resources to operate current programs and activities and additional resources to increase staff since many involved are still volunteers. They work hard to remain purposeful, lean, and intentional, and continue to inspire others to lend their talents and services to projects (e.g., students helped with branding BB2C, and artist in residence working at epicenter to help with communications).

Ultimately, this work is challenging and requires hard work. You have to be committed and believe the work matters.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Stay focused on the mission

Partners should have ownership in the mission and shared goals to foster larger impact for a smaller community; include partners who believe they have the power to make change, belief in their community, and openness and willingness to take risks.

Build relationships

Community partnerships are nurtured and maintained through consistent relationship management and effort. BB2C creates many opportunities for community members to collaborate and be a part of their programs. BB2C uses a type of “hacking” and “start-up” culture by incubating alongside businesses in their makerspace. The hacking mindset doesn’t over think things, uses “failures” as opportunities to learn, and keeps goals small, the team tight, and the timeline short.⁷

- **An example of building relationships through constant communication and effort is BB2C’s engagement with Belpre City Schools.** Initially, when BB2C approached Belpre to get involved, they did not do it well. In hindsight, BB2C was not ready to have an official partnership with another district. BB2C was still new, and highly focused on Marietta City Schools. This approach was not by choice, but rather due to the group’s capacity. They had an initial meeting with the Belpre guidance counselor (Fall 2013), and invited her to a BB2C subcommittee meeting as her first experience. The subcommittee meeting she attended was focused on bringing back an existing program (Partners in Education) for Marietta City Schools. BB2C representatives quickly realized their mistake when she left with the impression that BB2C was only for Marietta City Schools. After that, anyone new was invited to the BB2C full committee meetings for their first experience, and they could choose the subcommittee that had the best alignment and interest to them. They continued conversations and collaboration with Belpre over the next few years, but did not pursue an official partnership agreement until 2017. In the meantime, the guidance counselor moved to Fort Frye High School and decided to participate in a BB2C activity, the Problem Scenario Project, which provides needed graduate credit to teachers and partners them with a local business representative. After participating, she made the statement that BB2C had come a long way since her first introduction to the organization. Fort Frye became an official partner in 2016, and the guidance counselor is the district contact, as well as a teacher leader in the Problem Scenario Project.
- **For three years, BB2C networked for Chemours, a polymer manufacturing plan, to participate in BB2C programs. A local engineering firm gave BB2C contact information for one of the engineers.** They contacted her and even though they were unable to participate in BB2C’s Discover Engineering Day program that year, they expressed interest for the next year. BB2C discussed job shadowing and attended a manufacturing sector partnership group in West Virginia where they made connections with the company.

Chemours allowed BB2C students to participate in a job-shadowing placement with the company and participated in the 2nd Annual Discover Engineering Day by facilitating a hands-on activity with 37 students. Chemours also participated in the networking lunch following the hands-on activities and plans to participate in BB2C’s Family Career Awareness Day project.

⁷ School Retool. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://schoolretool.org/>

As a result of BB2C's ongoing relationship management and efforts, the current state of business participation is better than ever. Business participation in programming is high because they are designed to include local businesses, such as job shadowing and problem-scenario projects. Getting businesses to regularly attend BB2C community meetings is more challenging, but the governing board does consist of approximately 50 percent business representation.

Set the stage for collaboration

Ensure partners represent different sectors and create an environment for others to feel comfortable bringing up concerns and ideas, and mutually determine organizational priorities and processes. Organizational priorities and processes are determined through a collaborative effort using community feedback. A small leadership team meets to align issues prior to soliciting input during subcommittee and bi-monthly community meetings. However, this process is starting to form through more rigid committees and hierarchy since establishing a nonprofit status.

Develop structures and systems

Formalize structures to make sure that as the work increases in intensity and complexity, there is adequate organizational capacity to operate efficiently and effectively (e.g., establish backbone organization, distributed leadership model, steering committee or board well-grounded and representative of educators and business, an education connection that serves as a "credible broker" for the collaboration).

Build strong leadership

It's essential to have an individual serve as the driver, the "energy, heart, and soul" who is dedicated to the mission and whose job it is to think and care about the collaborative (e.g., educational leader and boundary spanner). A strong, organized leader must serve as a champion for the group, ensure priorities are in scope, and navigate the school district (e.g., superintendent, board of education, and faculty), city/county, and community partners.

Engage volunteers

Recruit and manage volunteers effectively to help cross the boundaries between education and business.

Foster ongoing communication

Develop messaging and a communication plan to clarify the BB2C's work (e.g., develop language around integrated BB2C pathway to show how the programs are cohesive and support the same mission).

Seek continuous improvement

Practice a continuous improvement model by collecting feedback and responding to the evidence with changes and continually evolve by addressing the community's needs. BB2C uses surveys and anecdotal evidence to capture the voice of students, community members, teachers, program participants, and collaborative partners as well as social media, website, and email analytics.

Ensure sustainability

Secure a sustainable source of funding.

Leverage community assets

Cultivate community assets that can be developed as resources in educational and economic development.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 **Expect turnover in every industry and sector with which you are engaged.** Leadership changes, people retire or take jobs at other institutions, policies change, etc. Some people will attend meetings because it is part of their job description, and others attend because they are passionate about the work. In both cases, these people may move on, drift off, or end up with another focus in their life. This is okay, and is the reason you should never stop recruiting people to be a part of the work. Having many opportunities for people to get involved, with different levels of time commitment and venues for volunteering, is vital. People should be able to start slow, or to jump in with both feet. Relationship development and maintenance are the key to sustainability.
- 2 **Some relationships are not ready to be built, yet. Timing is key.** When the timing is right, the opportunity will present itself. Have regularly occurring conversations, be open and ready, but don't push.
- 3 **Keep your mission front and center.** As new partners and collaborators engage, they can create mission slide if the leaders don't maintain focus on the group's mission. Have regularly occurring conversations about achieving the initiative's mission and vision. It is okay to say that what someone is proposing is outside of the realm of the group's work. The person will self-select out if it is not the right fit for them. More will come to the table if you stay true to the mission.
- 4 **Cultivate community assets that can be developed as resources.** Knowing your community's assets is vital. BB2C has engaged community assets to move forward with project development and implementation in various ways.
 - Marietta College has afforded BB2C several opportunities to accomplish goals by engaging its students. For example, a group of students in the marketing and design department created the BB2C logo and original website design as a community service project. At the end of the project, they provided BB2C with a binder outlining the specifications needed to fully develop the brand identity.
 - The Marietta Community Foundation stepped up to act as the BB2C's primary fiscal agent when a grant opportunity came that required 501(c)(3) status, and they continue to serve in this capacity. The Foundation combined forces on projects with Memorial Health System, Washington County Career Center, Washington State Community College, Marietta Area Chamber of Commerce, Washington County Family and Children First, Washington County Health Department, and more.

Early on, BB2C recognized the need to coordinate, and not duplicate, career awareness and development efforts. This commitment requires ongoing conversation to be aware of the community's assets and working with the community to further develop what is needed.



5 To ensure replicability, have a small community focus.

- Know the businesses, people, attitudes, and culture,
- Take what works, and
- Add your own culture, values, and understanding of how your school and community functions.

BB2C was asked, “What tips would you provide to someone starting a similar effort in an area where the next school is 100 miles away?”

“In this case, the school may have to be the center of the work, unless the community has another asset to utilize (Chamber of Commerce, economic development organization, health department, etc.). Many small rural areas with a K–12 school with one building use that school as a community hub (e.g., Eastern Local in Meigs County). In an isolated community, establishing assets that are even remotely a possibility for partnering is important as the work is being established. The key will always be to have leaders who are willing to develop relationships, seek and find opportunities, work through issues and problems with patience and the advice of others, and find ways to institutionalize the work being done within organizations that make sense.”

—Tasha Werry, BB2C Executive Director

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BB2C?

In addition to using a community network to increase interaction between schools and businesses and engage students in community-based experiences, BB2C plans to solidify its county-wide presence by establishing agreements with all county districts, expanding its regional footprint to work collaboratively across arbitrary borders to create a multi-state partnership with West Virginia, continuing to impact the culture of how the county operates (e.g., career pipelines, apprenticeship programs, secondary, high school, and institutes of higher education offerings), continually evolving by growing and addressing the needs of the community (e.g., epicenter and makerspace), and serving as a model Regional Workforce Collaboration and resource for other communities starting their own collaboration.

BB2C will continue advocating for the cultivation of community assets to be developed as resources to support the county's educational and economic development, and advocate boundary spanning by educators and business representatives to increase shared understandings between educators and community members through intentional collaborative interactions.



BB2C'S PERSPECTIVE ON LIZZIE'S STORY

“Lizzie came into an internship experience with BB2C, and I had the opportunity to watch her grow and evolve over the past year. She was able to apply skills she learned in her internship, such as networking and the importance of social media, to real world situations. She worked with the businesses in our incubator and learned from them as well. Later, she opened her own business while still in high school. It has been an honor to see her path thus far.”

—Tonya Davis, BB2C Coordinator

“BB2C programs should exist because even if you have no idea what you want to do after high school you have the opportunity to do as many job shadows as you would like to help you make up your mind and get your career started.”

—Lizzie

THE BASIC BB2C FRAMEWORK

Creating school-to-work partnerships is about building meaningful relationships through networking and successfully navigating the Circles of Engagement and Scalability. Communities must be ready for change to build meaningful school-to-work partnerships. Although change readiness is conceptualized variously in different fields, some elements are common to all. For example, research on the notion of buy-in suggests that when individuals or entities to be involved in a change effort are included in decisions about its implementation, implementation proceeds more successfully.⁸

A newer view of change called the “complex adaptive systems,” most closely describes the BB2C model. Readiness for change, according to this model, is interpreted as a state in which individuals, subsystems, and larger systems move together toward adopting an innovation or implementing a new practice. Change is nonlinear, and emergent as interrelated systems adapt to changing conditions and needs. These adaptations eventually become orderly patterns of self-organization, and change is “co-evolutionary”.⁹

In complex adaptive systems:

- Self-organizing and new elements will emerge at various points.
- Views and experiences of those at a variety of points in an organization are necessary to gain an understanding of the system.
- Simple rules or guiding principles can lead to innovative emergent changes.
- Forming of new generative relationships can stimulate change, including producing new insights and solutions to address complex problems.

CIRCLES OF ENGAGEMENT & SCALABILITY



“...It takes tenacity and patience, and a willingness to be flexible and consider all points of view before moving forward. You also need to be able to overlook things (nothing illegal, improper, or illicit), but things like personal political views. It takes a balance of having open relationships, but also not veering too far into the personal.”

—Tasha Werry, BB2C Executive Director

⁸ Howley, C. (2012, August 24). *Readiness For Change (Rep.)*. Retrieved <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535400.pdf> (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED535400)

⁹ Howley, C. (2012, August 24). *Readiness For Change (Rep.)*. Retrieved <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535400.pdf> (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED535400)

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RESOURCES

To access additional information and various resources to support the development and sustainability of school-to-work partnerships, visit the Building Bridges to Careers website at www.buildingbridgestocareers.org.

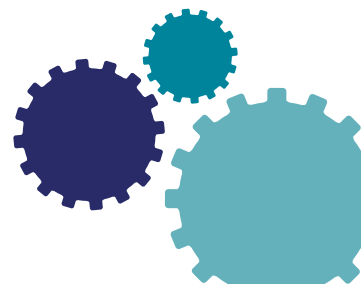
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