

The Value of Student Employee-Led Projects

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RESOURCE	Guide

In today's dynamic workplace and especially within various areas of colleges and universities, we know student employees are more than simply support staff - they are emerging professionals eager to contribute in meaningful and long lasting ways. By encouraging student employees and our working learners to identify, develop, and execute projects, supervisors can foster a culture of innovation while enhancing workplace efficiency. Though it may require guidance and support, the time commitment and investment in these projects truly benefits all involved: student employee, supervisor, and department or office.

Why Encourage Student Employee Projects?

Skill Development & Career Readiness

When students take ownership of projects, they develop essential career skills such as problem-solving, time management, leadership, and communication. These experiences make them more prepared for full-time roles after graduation and allow them to build a portfolio of real-world contributions. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), nearly 90% of employers are seeking evidence of a student's ability to solve problems and nearly 80% are seeking candidates who have strong teamwork skills.

Increased Engagement & Retention

Employees who feel their work has meaning are more engaged and invested in their roles. Projects allow student employees to see the impact of their work, increasing motivation and job satisfaction.

Operational & Organizational Benefits

Student-led projects can lead to streamlined processes, improved efficiencies, and creative solutions that may not have been previously considered. These contributions can help improve workflow and even reduce repetitive tasks for full-time staff.

How to Support Student Employee Projects Effectively

Encourage Ownership While Providing Guidance

- Empower students to identify areas for improvement within their role or department.
- Offer structured check-ins rather than micromanagement to ensure progress and direction.

Set Clear Expectations

- Encourage students to use the Working Learner Project Development Worksheet to outline their project goals, deliverables, and timelines.
- Ensure their projects align with departmental priorities so the work remains relevant and valuable.

Provide Resources & Feedback

- Help students identify the tools, training, or mentorship they may need to succeed.
- Offer constructive feedback throughout the process to encourage learning and development.
- Continue to connect the project and the various steps to skill development and allow your student employee to see the connection through transferable skills.



Celebrate & Acknowledge Contributions

- Once a project is completed, showcase the impact by sharing results in team meetings or department newsletters.
- Recognize your student's effort through appreciation, whether through verbal praise, a letter of recommendation, or a resume-boosting endorsement.

The Long-Term Impact

Supervisors who actively engage in student employee development create an enriching work environment that not only benefits the student but also strengthens the department. By giving student employees opportunities to lead projects, supervisors help develop future professionals while tapping into fresh perspectives that can drive meaningful change in the workplace.

Encouraging project-based work isn't just about giving students something extra to do or supervisors delegating tasks they do not have time for - it's about fostering a proactive, innovative, and growth-oriented work environment where student employees learn and evolve. Investing in student employee projects today ensures a stronger, more capable talent pool for the future.