

Creating Meaningful Student Opportunities Without Creating Free-Labor Expectations

For approved community partners, employers, nonprofits, educators, workforce organizations, mentors, alumni, sponsors, and other outside supporters.

Students are learners and emerging professionals first.

Community partners help students grow by offering real audiences, meaningful needs, constructive feedback, professional recognition, and appropriately scoped opportunities to contribute.

Welcome and Purpose

GradPlanHQ helps students build experience, proof, relationships, and visibility. Community partners make that development more meaningful by providing real audiences, real needs, real feedback, real relationships, and real opportunities to contribute.

These guidelines protect student learning, privacy, time, autonomy, and professional development while supporting trustworthy partnerships that create value for both the student and the organization.

Community partners are not buying access to students.

Participation is based on trust, appropriate contribution, student development, and mutual benefit. Students are never required to engage with a community partner and may decline an introduction, project, event, request, reference conversation, or professional connection without retaliation.

The Approved Community Partner Role

An Approved Community Partner is a guest and supporter within a student-centered professional-development community. Community partners are not ordinary student members, and partner permissions may be more limited than student-member permissions.

Approved partner participation is currently application-based and may be offered without charge while GradPlanHQ tests and refines the role. There is no standard community-partner membership price at this time.

Community Partners May Submit reviewed project ideas • Attend selected showcases or public events • View student work students choose to share • Offer constructive feedback • Recognize completed contributions • Provide earned references or LinkedIn recommendations • Make appropriate professional introductions • Share approved resources and opportunities	Community Partners May Not Treat students as free labor • Post unreviewed work requests • Send mass or repeated unsolicited messages • Pressure students to accept work • Harvest student data • Bypass GradPlanHQ review • Require purchases • Use student work without permission • Make unverified employment promises
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Access and Permissions

Access to activities, events, student information, discussions, or platform features is determined by GradPlanHQ permissions and student consent. GradPlanHQ may approve, limit, suspend, or remove partner access when necessary to protect students and the integrity of the community.

Project Submission and Review

All project ideas go through GradPlanHQ review.

Partners should not bypass the review process by directly asking students to complete unpaid work.

A project idea should include:

A clear need	A real audience
A manageable scope	A realistic timeline
An appropriate student role	A defined deliverable
A named contact	A feedback plan
A meaningful opportunity for learning and proof	Clear ownership, permission, and intended-use information

Review Outcomes

GradPlanHQ may request changes, reduce the scope, recommend a different format, delay the opportunity, decline the project, or refer the organization to a paid professional, employee, intern, contractor, or licensed provider when the work is not appropriate for a student project.

Approval of an idea does not guarantee that a student will select or complete it.

The Mutual-Benefit Standard

The goal is not free labor.

The goal is meaningful, appropriately scoped work that creates value for both the student and the organization.

Value for the Student

Experience • Proof • Relationships •
Visibility • Professional confidence •
Applied skills • Reflection • References •
A completed artifact or deliverable

Value for the Organization

Research • Outreach • Event support •
Content • Resource development •
Feedback • Training • Program
improvement • Community engagement •
A clearly scoped deliverable

Work That Is Not Appropriate

Student projects must not replace work that should reasonably be performed by a paid employee, paid intern, contractor, licensed professional, regulated professional, or a person with access to confidential or protected information.

- Indefinite administrative support or ongoing operational staffing
- Repetitive work without meaningful learning
- Personal errands or unrelated tasks
- Unsupervised access to sensitive systems or records
- Work beyond the student’s competence
- Unreasonable deadlines or unapproved scope expansion
- Work creating significant legal, financial, physical, or reputational risk
- Work labeled a student project primarily to avoid paying a worker

Student Autonomy

Students choose whether to pursue an optional project, introduction, event, or opportunity. Students may ask questions, request clarification, negotiate a manageable scope, decline an opportunity, leave a project when appropriate, report a concern, or request GradPlanHQ support.

Partners Must Not

Pressure students to accept work • Punish students for declining • Threaten references • Withhold agreed recognition unfairly • Increase project scope without discussion • Use academic standing, immigration status, financial situation, age, or career anxiety to create pressure

Communication and Direct Messaging

Approved communication should be relevant, respectful, limited to the agreed purpose, appropriate for a professional setting, and consistent with student consent and platform permissions.

- No mass direct messages
- No repeated contact after a student does not respond
- No unrelated sales, personal pitches, or political campaigns
- No undisclosed off-platform work invitations
- No adding students to mailing lists without permission
- No unnecessary requests for personal contact information
- No harvesting recruiting leads from student profiles
- No attempts to evade moderation or review channels

Privacy and Student Information

No partner receives unrestricted access to student data.

Student data is not a sponsorship benefit and may only be used for the approved purpose for which it was shared.

- Do not download or copy student directories
- Do not scrape profiles or collect unnecessary personal data
- Do not sell, transfer, or share student information
- Do not publish a student's name, image, work, story, or contact information without permission
- Do not share private project discussions publicly without approval
- Do not request protected or sensitive information unless clearly necessary, lawful, and approved

Student Work and Intellectual Property

Ownership and permission should be discussed before work begins. The project brief should identify what the student will create, what the organization may use, whether public sharing is expected, whether attribution is required, whether confidential material is involved, and whether the student may include the work in a portfolio, resume, presentation, or LinkedIn post.

Community partners must not publish, sell, alter, or claim student work beyond the agreed permissions. Students should receive appropriate credit for their contributions.

Feedback, Recognition, and References

Community partners are encouraged to strengthen student visibility through thoughtful project feedback, public thanks when appropriate, showcase participation, verification of completed contributions, LinkedIn engagement, professional introductions, and references or recommendations when earned.

Recognition should be honest and earned.

A reference or LinkedIn recommendation is never guaranteed. Partners should only provide endorsements they can honestly support and should not exaggerate student results or claim outcomes they cannot verify.

Recruiting and Employment

Partners may discuss legitimate employment, internship, contract, or volunteer opportunities when permitted. However:

- Sponsorship does not purchase recruiting access
- Partner status does not guarantee access to students
- Students are not required to apply
- GradPlanHQ does not guarantee candidate quality, availability, or hiring outcomes
- Paid and unpaid opportunities must be described accurately
- Hiring decisions must remain independent of sponsorship or partner status

Professional Conduct

The following conduct is prohibited in GradPlanHQ spaces, events, projects, and partner interactions:

Harassment or discrimination	Bullying or retaliation
Threats or unsafe behavior	Sexual or romantic solicitation
Inappropriate personal requests	Fraud or misrepresentation
Spam or unauthorized sales activity	Attempts to evade moderation or restrictions

Reporting Concerns

Partners and students may report concerns to a Community Manager, through the GradPlanHQ Contact Us form, or through another designated reporting method available at the time. Reports should include what happened, when it happened, who was involved, and relevant documentation when available.

GradPlanHQ will review reports as confidentially as circumstances permit. Retaliation against anyone who reports a concern in good faith is prohibited. Immediate threats should be reported to local emergency services, campus safety, or the appropriate authority.

Possible Consequences

Responses may include informal guidance, a written reminder, removal of content or a project, communication restrictions, temporary suspension, removal from an event or project, revocation of partner access, permanent removal, or referral to an institution, platform, organization, or appropriate authority.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Community partners should use accessible language and materials, offer reasonable flexibility where appropriate, respect accommodation needs, avoid unnecessary barriers, make project expectations understandable, and provide materials in usable formats when reasonably possible.

Partner Acknowledgment

By participating as an Approved Community Partner,

the organization and its representatives agree to follow these Community Partner Guidelines, the GradPlanHQ Community Guidelines, applicable platform rules, and any project-specific agreement. Partner status may be reviewed, limited, suspended, or withdrawn when necessary to protect students and the integrity of the community.

How to Become an Approved Community Partner

Approved Community Partner access is currently application-based. There is no standard community-partner membership price at this time. Participation, permissions, and access may vary by organization, project, event, or pilot stage.

1	Submit a project idea
2	Complete a partner-interest form
3	Speak with GradPlanHQ
4	Agree to the Community Partner Guidelines
5	Receive an approved role with appropriate access

Help Students Build Experience Without Turning Students Into Free Labor

Strong community partnerships create value in both directions.

Students gain experience, proof, relationships, visibility, and confidence.

Organizations move appropriately scoped work forward.

Communities become better at developing talent from within.

BECOME AN APPROVED COMMUNITY PARTNER

Share a Project Idea | Explore Community Partner Opportunities | Contact
GradPlanHQ

www.gradplan.com

Founder: Kim Scott | Co-Founder: Joel Hankins

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review.