GRADPLANHQ

The GradPlanHQ Stakeholder Guide

How education, employers, workforce organizations, community partners, and funders can strengthen the web of support around students.

2026 EDITION

Students grow through a web of people, relationships, resources, and programs that already exist. Each stakeholder can strengthen a different, bounded part of that web.

> This is an operating guide. Use it to identify a goal your organization is working toward, see what you already have to build from, find where progress is harder than it should be, and choose one practical action.

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PUBLICATION INFORMATION

The GradPlanHQ Stakeholder Guide

How education, employers, workforce organizations, community partners, and funders can strengthen the web of support around students.

The GradPlanHQ Stakeholder Guide is a practical resource for education, employer, workforce, community, and funding leaders who help strengthen the web of support around students. Examples and suggested starting points are illustrative and should be adapted to local goals, capacity, policies, and participant needs.

FOR INFORMATION
gradplan.com

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A free GradPlanHQ publication

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Four questions. One clear path.

GradPlanHQ doesn't introduce a new job. It helps people make progress and extend the reach of work they are already doing.

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How to use this guide

Read it in order, or start with the question closest to where you are. Use it to:

- see who already shares in helping young people make the transition to adulthood;
- connect a job you are already doing with resources that already exist;
- understand how students prepare, practice, and adapt;
- choose one bounded contribution;
- test a practical next step.

THE JOB THAT UNITES US

Helping young people become capable, connected, contributing adults is a job we all share.

During periods of rapid change like this one, adding new ways to support their transition into adulthood and strengthening the web around them is vital. Our success is tied to theirs.

THE JOB REMAINS. THE CONDITIONS ARE CHANGING.

> **More experience and evidence are required.**
>
> Students are increasingly being asked to show what they can do and who they are before they land the entry-level opportunities that once helped them build that experience and develop professional skills.

> **Not every student can access the experience and practice they need.**
>
> In 2023, an estimated 8.2 million learners wanted internships. Only 3.6 million had one, and 2.5 million had a quality internship.
>
> Source: Business-Higher Education Forum, Expanding Internships, 2024.

> **What comes next keeps changing.**
>
> Education, work, technology, hiring practices, career pathways, and employer expectations continue to shift.

STUDENTS SHOWED US SOMETHING IMPORTANT.

Working with students revealed how much they can do when they have meaningful ways to connect what they already know, have, and care about to real opportunities to contribute and grow.

The goal isn't to ask less of students. It's to make it easier for them to take on meaningful challenges, build from assets they already have, and get the support they need to create quality experience and practice professional skills before a more formal opportunity depends on them.

SEE IT IN ACTION

See what becomes possible.

Shared value can be created when students connect what they're trying to accomplish with the people, relationships, resources, and opportunities already around them.

Kelsey

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY · SERVICE LEARNING

Kelsey saw a guidance-counseling and information gap affecting students nationally and recognized the same problem at the high school she had attended. She asked to take her service-learning project there instead of completing the arranged school visit near campus.

What if more students could use their personal assets to turn coursework into meaningful experience?

Read Kelsey's full story: gradplan.com/success-stories/kelsey

Emily

IUPUI · GRAPHIC DESIGN CAPSTONE

Emily already needed to complete a capstone. A community partner working to expand service-learning opportunities happened to see her classwork hanging in a hallway, opening the door to real work around a real university need.

The work gave Emily something concrete she could discuss with employers, include in her portfolio, and share as a project on LinkedIn.

What if connecting students to real work didn't depend so much on chance?

Read Emily's full story: gradplan.com/success-stories/emily

Julie

HUNTINGTON HIGH SCHOOL · HONORS PROJECT

Julie used a required Honors project to tackle period-product access, a problem that can affect students' school attendance and participation. Uncomfortable about talking to national suppliers and local businesses, she kept moving forward by practicing with her project mentor before making the calls and visits herself.

What if students themselves could help us find more ways to improve student success?

Read Julie's full story: gradplan.com/success-stories/period-product-access

WHAT IF?

What if we made more of this easier?

What if knowing where to start were easier?

Could a clearer starting point help students move from knowing they need experience to actually creating it?

What if more students could build experience by addressing problems they encountered while navigating their own education?

Could students themselves become part of the capacity available to strengthen student engagement, success, and community contribution?

What if we addressed the experiential-learning gap by empowering students to create quality experiences of their own?

Could structured starting points, personal assets, coursework, relationships, and community connections help make that possible?

What if we could share processes and technology to make better use of what we already have?

Could the people, programs, relationships, community-service networks, knowledge, and willingness to help already around students create more value when they're easier to connect?

CONNECT THE PIECES

GradPlanHQ helps what already exists work better together around students.

Start with what we already have. Make connections easier. Give students room to take action and give the people around them easier ways to help.

A process for adapting as opportunities, expectations, and circumstances change.

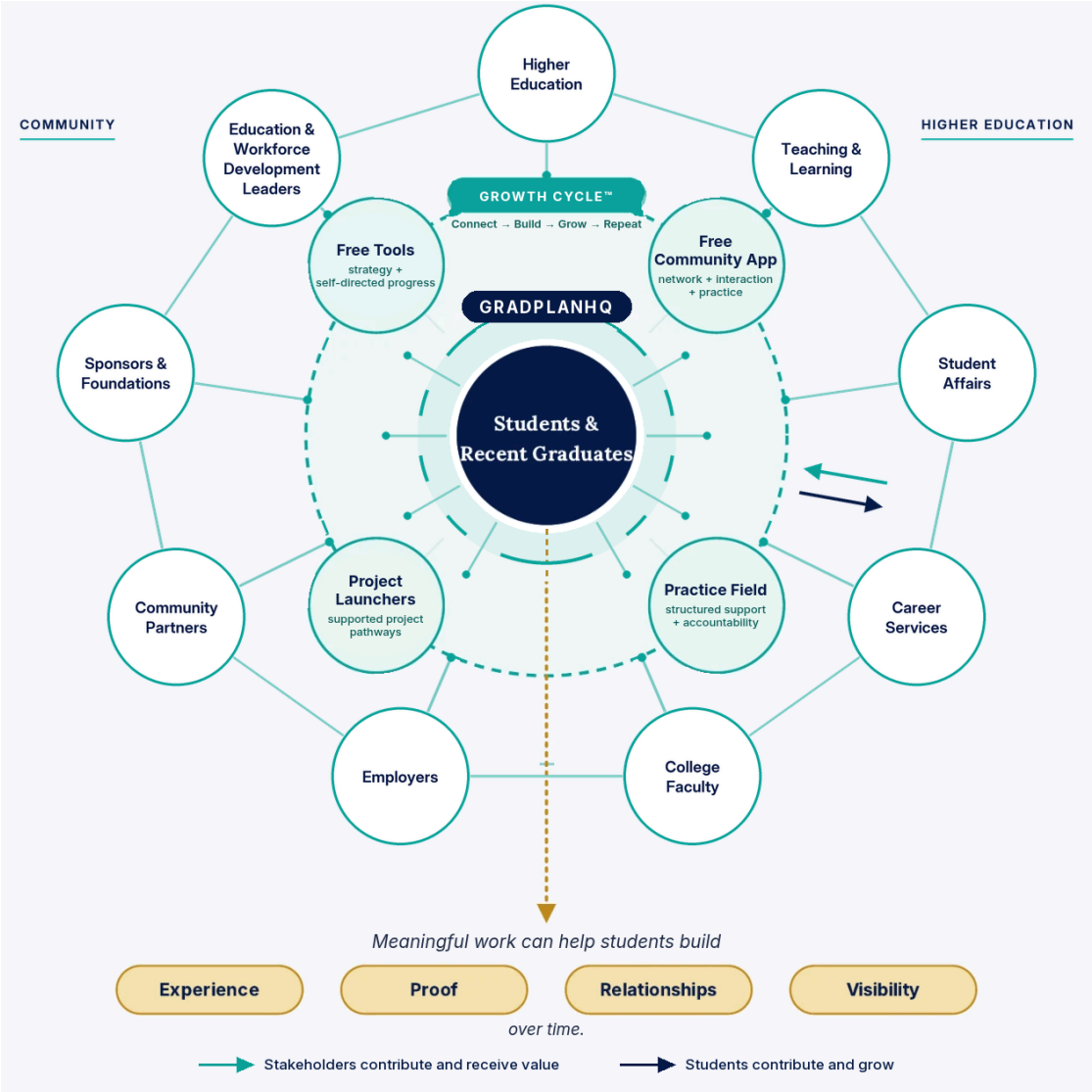
The GradPlanHQ Growth Cycle™

The GradPlanHQ Growth Cycle™ is the process students use to move work forward. Students can enter wherever it makes sense; it isn't a required linear sequence.



EXTENDING THE REACH OF WHAT ALREADY WORKS

GradPlanHQ builds on work already happening across the web rather than asking stakeholders to adopt a new workflow. Shared processes and familiar technology make it easier to connect that work, add capacity, extend its reach, and better serve students.



People participate when participation makes something important easier to do. GradPlanHQ helps connect those efforts so progress for one stakeholder can also create value for students and strengthen the wider web around them.

HOW WE SUPPORT STUDENTS

GradPlanHQ is an experiential-learning and professional-development community for college students and recent graduates.

Free Tools

Work on your own to build a strategy and gain momentum.

Open to everyone with no account, email, or membership required. Help students stop, take notice, take stock of what they already have, build a personal strategy, and intentionally move it forward through the Growth Cycle.

Community App

Add people and a network to help you go farther.

For eligible college students and recent graduates. Verification helps create a more trusted, lower-stakes place to practice, try things, make mistakes, and build relationships.

Help members find people, practice professional networking and communication, participate and contribute, exchange feedback, and stay current.

Practice Field

Add structure, live support, and accountability if you stall out.

Three goals. Nine recurring Meetups.

Build Your Brand	Create Experience	Tell Your Story
Identify Your Values, Interests, and Story	Create Projects to Develop Your Skills	Translate Skills to Your Résumé Effectively
Craft Your LinkedIn Bio and Profile	Turn Class Projects Into Work Experience	Build Impact Stories for Your Interviews
Grow Your Online Presence and Network	Earn Credentials That Validate Your Skills	Build Trust and Credibility via Your Socials

Nine recurring Action & Momentum Meetups give students protected working time, relevant resources, feedback, accountability, live support, and repeated practice around these goals.

Project Launcher Support & Meetups

Project Launchers give students a direction when they need experience but aren't sure what to create.

The Free Tools help turn that direction into something concrete before asking someone else for time.

Practice Field support and focused Project Launcher Meetups help students line it up, do the work, follow through, capture the value, and practice telling the story.

PeerTakes · Teach It Back · Community Asset Map · Design Your Own Experience

THE COMMUNITY CREATES EXPERIENCE, TOO

Students don’t have to wait for an internship or outside project to begin practicing professionally.

Building an experiential-learning and professional-development community creates real work. Students can apply what they’re learning in their majors while helping build, improve, and extend the Community.

Real Community needs can create opportunities in research, communication, data analysis, design, technology, education, outreach, evaluation, storytelling, project coordination, resource mapping, and more.

Your major can shape what you contribute. It doesn’t have to define your role.

Students can contribute through their fields, stretch into work they want to practice, or work alongside students bringing different skills and perspectives.

That gives students another place to work together across boundaries while practicing how they communicate, collaborate, contribute, ask for feedback, follow through, and take responsibility.

PRACTICE → **CONTRIBUTE** → **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY** → **LEAD**

A student might begin with one piece of work, return to take on more responsibility, collaborate with students from other fields, help expand a project, mentor another member, or help hand the work forward.

> **One student’s work can create the next student’s opportunity to practice, contribute, collaborate, or lead.**

PROJECT LAUNCHERS

Take your practice into the world.

Project Launchers give students structured places to start when they need experience but aren't sure what to create. Students can choose the Launcher that fits what they need now. Repeated experience can also prepare them to design increasingly independent opportunities on their own.

PeerTakes

Use your own experience to practice empathy leadership and help students coming behind you.

Use school, campus, or community connections to create a mentoring opportunity aimed at student engagement and success.

Practice: Communication · Empathy leadership · Storytelling · Mentoring · Active listening · Outreach · Networking · Relationship-building · Initiative · Follow-through

Teach It Back

Turn learning into practice and contribution.

Start with something you are learning through coursework, Academy learning, a credential, or another learning opportunity. Find an appropriate real assignment where you can apply it, then help someone else use what you learned.

Practice: Communication · Applied problem-solving · Initiative · Professional outreach · Teaching · Facilitation · Collaboration · Feedback · Follow-through

Community Asset Map

Turn outreach into relationships and community knowledge.

Connect with people and organizations to identify relationships, programs, resources, opportunities, and community assets while practicing professional outreach and networking.

What one student learns can give the next student a better starting point: people to contact, needs to explore, possible partners, mentors, and projects.

Practice: Professional outreach · Networking · Active listening · Research · Communication · Relationship-building · Organization · Critical thinking · Follow-through

Design Your Own Experience

Intentionally design more independent opportunities on your own.

Use your goals, learning, assets, relationships, and growing experience to shape work around a real need or opportunity.

Practice: Strategic thinking · Judgment · Initiative · Problem-solving · Professional communication · Project management · Stakeholder communication · Negotiation · Ownership · Leadership

START WHERE YOU NEED TO START. GROW INTO WHAT COMES NEXT.

The Launchers are not required steps. The developmental opportunity is learning how to create, navigate, and carry increasingly independent work.

BUILD FROM THE EXPERIENCE

Finishing the project isn't the end of the Growth Cycle. What students learn from one experience can strengthen the next.

Prepare before the ask

The Free Tools help students take stock, connect learning to the work, think through the project, and bring forward something concrete another person can question and shape.

Get support through the work

Project Launcher Support & Meetups help students line it up, do the work, follow through, capture the value, and practice telling the story.

Better-prepared students can make it easier for professors, employers, mentors, alumni, and community partners to say yes.

Learn from what you did

Real experience gives students something substantive to examine:

What worked? What changed? What was harder than expected? What did I learn? What would I do differently next time?

Students can then decide what additional learning would make the next experience stronger.

Build on strong learning that already exists

Students don't need GradPlanHQ to recreate every course, framework, or credential.

They can build from coursework, Academy learning, professional frameworks, existing training, and credentials that support their goals.

LEARN. APPLY. REPEAT.

Academy learning and Framework Discovery help students connect coursework, professional frameworks, and other strong learning resources to real work, then apply what they learn to the next experience.

Use learning to strengthen the next experience

EXPERIENCE → LEARN → APPLY → GROW → REPEAT

The goal is not to collect frameworks or credentials. It is to become more capable of designing quality work and opportunities of your own.

WHAT ROLE CAN I PLAY?

Start with a job you are already doing.

Participation may make that work easier to do.

Career readiness · Student success · Experiential learning · Community engagement · Workforce development · Employer engagement

Try the process we ask students to use

1. **Name the job**
   What are three goals your organization is working toward related to students, recent graduates, or early-career talent?
2. **Take stock**
   What people, programs, relationships, knowledge, resources, community-service connections, and opportunities do you already have?
3. **Find the friction**
   What is making progress harder than it should be?
4. **Choose one bounded contribution**
   What practical action could make the work easier?

Who else sees this?

Who understands this challenge particularly well? Who is already trying to improve it? Who could be a natural champion, connector, or partner?

Assets before programs

FRAGMENTATION VERSUS SCARCITY

The opportunity may already exist. The student may already be capable. The partner may already care. The missing element is often the connection.

Preserve what works. Strengthen what has become too weak. Add only what the changing environment requires.

STUDENTS AS CONTRIBUTORS

Students need support. They can also contribute now.

Students spend years experiencing the systems stakeholders are trying to improve. They can notice gaps, confusing handoffs, missing information, unnecessary friction, problems affecting students, and opportunities adults may not see from the same vantage point.

Students aren't only people to design for. Their experience, relationships, knowledge, and capacity to contribute can also become assets.

Experience can create value in both directions

As members gain experience, they can mentor, facilitate, contribute expertise, help shape projects, make introductions, or help train the next person. Those contributions can also create opportunities for the experienced member to practice leadership, mentoring, coordination, communication, and greater responsibility.

One member's experience can become another student's starting asset.

WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

Start with one practical step.

You don't need everyone to agree before someone can begin.

Students can start.
Choose the next action that supports their strategy.

Stakeholders can contribute.
Make one part of work that already matters easier to move.

Support can grow around participation.
Add connections, resources, funding, or structure where experience shows they would help.

LEARNING FROM THE WORK

What is happening, and what should happen next?

Use three lenses:

Student
What are students doing, practicing, contributing, creating, learning, reflecting on, and capturing?

Partner
What is useful? What work is moving? What remains difficult?

Community
What is being created or strengthened? What relationships are forming? What is becoming easier to see, use, or build on?

What should happen next?

Repeat. Adapt. Expand. Pause or stop.

> **Start with what is already happening. Learn from what works. Strengthen what proves valuable.**

START HERE

Choose one next step.

What did this guide help you see that may be worth trying?

Bring in the right people

Who already understands the job, assets, or friction you identified? Who could help shape a first move?

Start small and learn

Try something bounded. See what happens. Keep, change, expand, or stop based on what you learn.

Who should be part of the next conversation?

Strengthening the web of support doesn't begin when every organization agrees. It begins when a few people help important work move forward, learn from what happens, and make the path stronger for the people who follow.

Connect. Build. Grow. Repeat.

Explore GradPlanHQ

See the student experience, explore your role, or share GradPlanHQ with someone else.

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